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MANAGEMENT AND MANAGED:
A STUDY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF SHOP FLOOR INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AT CHRYSLER CORPORATION'S DODGE MAIN, DETROIT, FACTORY, 1930-1980

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Synopsis

Management and managed: a study of the development of shop floor industrial relations at Chrysler Corporation's Dodge Main, Detroit factory from 1930 to 1980

The thesis argues that industrial relations outcomes in different car manufacturing companies differed primarily because of managerial traditions, rather than because of differences in technological or market positions. These traditions were shaped and altered according to top management's political origins, the particular firm's corporate structure, its business strategy and market position. Managerial control is seen as a dual mechanism: a power relationship between capital and labour in which the balance of forces remained largely unchanged throughout the period investigated; and as shop floor authority over the labour process. The extent of the managerial 'frontier of control' over the pace and pattern of work throughout the fifty years studied at Dodge Main varied according to the capacity of collective worker organization to struggle to place restraints upon that authority.

Collective action was largely shaped by workers' views of what constituted their "legitimate rights". These views reflected the interplay of a complex of forces: outside political developments, government policy, managerial ideology, the development of the particular company's industrial relations' strategy and the workers' own recent experience of workplace struggle and of cyclical economic movements.

The study examines changes in the management structure and business and industrial relations strategy of the Chrysler Corporation of America, focusing particularly on developments at Chrysler's biggest factory, Dodge Main, with comparisons taken from General Motors and Ford which operated in the same market using similar technology.

The main empirical findings are that mass unionism was achieved in a period of heightened struggle after managerial practice had "legitimised" important aspects of shop floor union organisation; and that subsequently Chrysler experienced widespread sectional bargaining and the emergence of custom and practice agreements that imposed significant restraints on management's "right to manage" between 1939 and 1957. These restraints on managerial authority were only consistently challenged and then eventually limited or removed when major changes in the market situation imposed changes in business strategy and changes in management structure first between 1956 and 1959 and then in 1978 to 1982. Managerial responses to product and labour market changes were thus found to be a major element determining the particular configuration of a firm's industrial relations system.

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INTRODUCTION

Someone manages and someone is managed, and this is an eternal opposition of interest, which may be made bearable but can never be eliminated in a complex, industrial society.

Clark Kerr, American Journal of Sociology, November 1954.

The labour relations record of Chrysler, America's third largest auto manufacturer and tenth largest corporation, throws doubt on accepted versions of American labour history. This book traces that record from 1928, when the three-year-old Chrysler Corporation acquired Dodge Brothers, to 1980, when Dodge Main was closed. It also tackles a far broader issue. The American auto industry was crucial in shaping modern industrial history throughout the world. It transformed and dominated American industry, whose leading companies, once consolidated in a massive domestic market, expanded to dominate other national economies after World War Two. It also combined two distinct traditions of industrial organization: mass production and high quality consumer durable production. This combination became in many ways a paradigm for the development of world industry this century. The exceptionalism (or lack of it) of Chrysler has, then, an importance for managerial control and the development of the labour process which extends beyond the United States.

The book is in six parts. Part One introduces the questions that prompted the writing of it - questions that were a response to sweeping generalizations about the development of the labour process and managerial control systems over the last fifty years. How can the continuing presence of both worker resistance and worker accommodation be explained? (Chapter 1) Why choose Chrysler for the study? (Chapter 2)

The three historical parts have separate introductions which seek to situate the relationships of management and managed at Chrysler in a wider historical, industrial and political context and to consider the key arguments relevant to each period. Part Two traces the union response to management strategy during the rooting of trade unionism at Dodge Main in the 1930s and suggests how the two interacted to produce Chrysler's particular form of shop floor unionism. (Chapters 3-7) Part Three considers the movement of the frontier of managerial control at Dodge Main as management attempted to re-establish autonomy during World War Two and in the late 1950s. (Chapters 8-11) Part Four considers the last twenty years when Chrysler strengthened its control system to take into account the new challenge of the black movement, and its workers voted to accept pace-setting contract concessions. (Chapters 12-17)

Part Five summarizes this historical micro-study and places it in the context of the debates on American exceptionalism. The conclusion is that Chrysler's relatively high levels of open conflict were the product not of a super-militant labour force but of management failure under conditions of considerable market pressure. Elsewhere in the US managements were able to suppress open conflict more effectively, but Chrysler management performed in many similar ways to the ineffective management of the UK car industry. (Chapter 18)

PART ONE

QUESTIONS

CHAPTER 1

MANAGEMENT, MANAGED AND CONTROL

Chapter 1 discusses the central concepts used in the book and critically examines certain aspects of the American literature on the development of the labour process over the last fifty years.

I. Concepts

Three distinct aspects of industrial relations dominate this history. The first is how management develops strategies to exert control over the labour process. The second is workers' consciousness and how it changes and legitimizes particular patterns of managerial control. And the third theme is about the significance of workers' collective organizations for workplace behaviour.

Other writers have tried to capture the complexity of the relationship between managers and managed by counterposing

"managerial control" to "workers'... strong unilateral control", and by invoking "the workplace rule of law" as a self-evident determinant of workers' actions.[2] But to understand the process of simultaneous consent and resistance in the workplace, the change in balance between both, and their different degrees of intensity over time, demands more sensitive analytical categories. New or amended concepts will be employed to encompass the totality of workplace experience. They are briefly introduced here.

Managerial power and authority

Management is a highly complex organizational and political process. Many who recognize that to discuss 'the working class' means examining the history, strength, politics and strategizing capacity of working class organization, frequently do not do same for management. Child's pioneering study of British management suggested management could be analysed from three different perspectives: as an "elite social grouping", as an "economic resource performing a series of technical functions", and as a "system of authority through which policy is translated into the execution of tasks".[3] Each perspective reveals a process

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1. Allan Flanders, Management and Unions: the Theory and Reform of Industrial Relations (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), 167.

2. David Brody, Workers in Industrial America: Essays on the 20th Century Struggle (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 206.

3. John Child, British Managerial Thought (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969), 13.

rather than a fixed and permanent entity, and analysis of these processes is crucial for a study of the shop floor interaction of management and managed. For workers' independent activity is more assertive in those spaces left for it by what Williamson has decribed[4] in cost analysis as "managerial discretion". And the converse is also true: managerial authority is most assertive where working class resistance is weakest. Managerial discretion, the leeway allowed individual managers in policy-execution, operates at all levels, from executives to foremen.[5] Thurley and Wood point out that this 'strategic choice' "implies that managements' objectives are not fixed but open, so that managers are not a 'neutral' group rationally deciding on organizational strategy purely in terms of given and non-competing organizational objectives".[6] The history of the managerial group and how structural or market constraints encourage the exercise of discretion and at what levels of management they operate most

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4. The development of "managerial discretion" within an organization when the expansion of a centralized unitary-form company to a level of complexity beyond the physical capacity of an individual chief executive, has been identified by Chandler and Williamson in terms of a loss of financial control; A. Chandler, Strategy and Structure (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 282-3; O E Williamson, Markets and Hierarchies: Analysis and Antitrust Legislation (New York: Free Press, 1975), 135. The argument here is that "administrative inefficiences" and "managerial control loss" also occur in the area of labour relations administration.

5. William Brown in his study of custom and practice in the British engineering industry distinguishes between "errors of commission" usually deliberately made by senior management and "errors of omission" generally made when foremen turn a blind eye; Piecework Bargaining (London: Heinemann, 1973), 98-9.

6. Keith Thurley and Stephen Wood, Industrial Relations and Management Strategy (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 3.

forcefully are therefore all important in the study.

'Managerial control' is a concept that embraces both the 'power' over workers generated by the labour-capital relationship and the consequent 'authority' management exercises on the job.[7] There is no Chinese wall dividing the two,[8] but it is argued here that this distinction between managerial power and authority is helpful while the Weberian definition of power and authority obscures the relationship between the division of and access to wealth in wider society and the pattern of managerial control.

The assumption that management is a dynamic phenomenon prompts the question: which aspects of management change? Fox introduces a useful distinction between two kind of relations management has with its employees:

> Market relations have to do with the terms and conditions on which labour is hired - they are therefore economic in character. Managerial relations arise out of what management seeks to do with its labour having hired it. They have to do with the exercise of authority and can for this reason be termed political in character.[9]

In the market, ownership provides management with absolute power, backed up by the state and the force of law, to determine

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7. Richard Hyman, Industrial Relations: A Marxist Introduction (London: Macmillan, 1975), 64.

8. Richard Hyman and Robert H Fryer, "Trade Unions: Sociology and Political Economy", Trade Unions under Capitalism, eds. Tom Clarke and Laurie Clements (London: Fontana, 1977), 152.

9. Alan Fox, "Industrial Sociology and Industrial Relations" (London: HMSO, Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers Associations, Research Paper 3, 1966), 6.

wage rates, the hours of work, numbers of workers and to construct the working environment. The precise terms are often disputed - for example, by workers asking for wage rises, or opposing a plant closure. But concessions of wage rises or a stay of execution of a plant closure do not challenge ownership rights or diminish managerial power. Increases in labour costs can hamper the return on capital and lead to financial loss or even bankruptcy, but historically the share of labour in total costs has moved little. And when labour costs have risen they have first stimulated management to push for greater worker output, and then, if they remained at a level that threatened managerial capital resources, have demonstrated capital's power to close plants and relocate geographically or into other investments.[10] As Wright has argued, "the fundamental class antagonism between workers and capitalists" arises out of their relationships in three distinct processes that mirror Child's approach to management: "capitalists control the accumulation process, decide how the physical means of production are to be used, and control the authority structure within the labour process".[11] Workers are totally excluded from the first, economic ownership, have a marginal influence over what plant and equipment is used, and

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10. Jeanne Prial Gordon, Paul Jarley and Louis A Ferman studied the US literature on plant closures in the 1960s and 1970s, and found: "the decision to shut down a plant or to relocate is a unilateral one...Management maintains that capital mobility is essential...Management has the right to make its own decision and publicize it at its own discretion"; Plant Closings and Economic Dislocation (Kalamazoo: W E Uphjohn Institute for Employment Research, 1981), 37.

11. Erik Olin Wright, Class, Crisis and the State (London: NLB, 1978), 73.

possess the potential to exercise any real restraint only over the third process, the authority structure. It is important to retain this understanding of managerial power as a process - or as a resource available to the top managers - rather than as a fixed historical given. The power resources of capital vary enormously in size, use and degree of mobility and accessibility, as do the political traditions of particular managements.

Once workers are hired, they are subject to the influence of 'managerial relations'. Managerial authority determines how work is organized and executed in the workplace. In contrast to managerial power, it is classically flexible. It is the prevailing politics and disciplinary process that management operates to secure adherence to the effort bargain - what is promised by workers in return for their wages. Its flexibility lies in the fact that what workers 'promise' they do not necessarily deliver and so employment contracts vary both in form and in content.[12] At its core the concept of managerial authority is about what Goodrich described as, "How the worker is treated - what sort of authority he is under, how much freedom he is allowed".[13]

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12. John Child, "Managerial strategies, labour process and new technology", Work Organization Research Centre Occasional Paper (Birmingham: Aston University, 1983), (mimeographed).

13. Carter L Goodich, The Frontier of Control, (London: Pluto, 1975, first ed. 1920), 27.

Goldthorpe also draws a distinction between managerial power and authority, but, following Weber, he defines authority as flowing from ownership:

> ...authority is understood, in the manner of Max Weber, as referring to the 'legitimate exercise of command'...
> Managerial authority...over workers stems, on the one hand, from the manager's status as the agent of the employer and, on the other, from the contract of employment in which workers have been engaged. In this sense, then, managerial authority must be seen as still at the present time largely intact: it has not been ceded, and indeed has not had to face any major challenge...Management, in other words, still retains its right to plan and conduct the affairs of the enterprise in the interests of the employer and, to this end, to issue orders to employees.14

Managerial power, Goldthorpe defines as "management's use of various resources at its disposal in order to achieve a work discipline". And it is this "power" that he sees as having been "weakened" by "the improved market situation of industrial workers...their more effective organization at shopfloor level, their greater self-confidence and heightened wants and expectations".[15]

Why is it important to invert Goldthorpe's definitions and to reserve "power" for the managerial processes directly consequent on the ownership of capital, and "authority" for the way workers experience management day-to-day? In Weber power is defined as the ability of a social actor to impose his will on another: "'power' is the probability that one actor within a

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14. John Goldthorpe, "Industrial Relations in Great Britain: a Critique of Reformism", op cit, eds Clarke and Clements, 192-3.

15. ibid.

social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance."[16] Power is viewed as manifest at the point of confrontation between individual social actors (or collectives of social actors). Authority, however, is legitimated power - a power that is accepted, respected, legitimated by the wider social order. For Weber the wider social order of modern industrial society rests on legal-rationality, not on tradition or charisma as in earlier societies:

> Our modern 'associations', above all the political ones, are of the type of 'legal' authority. That is, the legitimacy of the powerholder to give commands rests upon rules that are rationally established by enactment, by agreement, or by imposition. The legitimation for establishing these rules rests, in turn, upon a rationally enacted or interpreted 'constitution'. Orders are given in the name of the impersonal norm...17

The Weberian approach thus rests on two questionable assumptions. First, that power is a relationship between individual actors or collectives of individuals. In the following analysis of industrial relations in the American auto industry it is found, by contrast, that while it is individuals who access the power resources of capital, their behaviour can only be explained by reference to the wider business community of owners and controllers of capital.[18] Power is not, therefore, at root, a confrontation of a bureaucratic collective of individual managers

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16. Cited in Lewis A Coser, "The Notion of Power: Theoretical Developments", Sociological Theory, eds. Lewis A Coser and Bernard Rosenberg (New York: Macmillan, 1976), 151.

17. Max Weber, "Types of Authority", op cit, eds. Coser and Rosenberg, 131.

18. Howell John Harris argues that without assuming a monolothic and all-wise viewpoint, the use of the generic "business community" is a helpful analytic tool for studying American management in the 1930s and 1940s; The right to manage: Industrial Relations Policies of American Business in the 1940s (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1982), 4.

with collectives of individual workers, but of capital and labour resources.[19] Second, Weberians assume that authority is a higher form of power based on societal consent. But this begs the questions: who consented? how? and when?[20] And it projects the determining role of ideology as more important than the material relationship of capital to the worker with labour power to sell. This study finds it was the greater power resources of American management that allowed it more unrestrained authority on the shop floor than British management.[21] So by using the terms in this way, managerial power, as a generally inflexible feature of capitalist employment relations, and managerial authority, as an essentially subjective feature, the distinction between two forms of managerial control is confirmed and enriched. With managerial power viewed as deriving ultimately from capital, the shaping role of wider forces of production can be kept in mind; and with shopfloor managerial authority derived from managerial power resources, the subordination of labour to capital is

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19. As Hyman and Fryer argue: "the critical focus of any analysis of power must be the differential distribution of control over and access to resources and sanctions, both material and ideological"; op cit, 153.

20. Alan Aldridge, Power, Authority and Restrictive Practices: A Sociological Essay on Industrial Relations (Oxford: Blackwell, 1976), 114-6.

21. Stephen Hill notes that even in Britain the weakness of the Weberian approach appeared: "It became clear to several observers in the mid-1970s that the apparently agreed frameworks of rules which used to guide conflict resolution and the apparent consensus on the basic details of the organization of industry were based largely on worker acquiescence in the face of superior managerial power, rather than on any institutionalization and legitmization of norms and customary procedures"; Competition and Control at Work (London: Heinemann, 1981), 149.

retained.[22]

The distinction drawn here between managerial power and authority is most apparent when they are under challenge. The control held directly as a consequence of the purchase of labour power by capital can only be loosened by widespread social and political action; managerial authority, on the other hand, can be considerably weakened by restraints on its free exercise as a result of collective pressure by workers who do not see themselves as posing a revolutionary challenge. Managerial authority faces societal, operational or collectively-imposed worker restraints. Habit, mis-management, conscious self-restraint and changes in managerial ideology can all check the maximising of profit. So can state legislation or other forms of political pressure, workers' collective pressure - and the interaction of all these. Profit-maximising economic man may exist in the classical textbooks, but in real life the central profit motive experiences major interference.

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22. Edward Greer makes a parallel critique of both pluralist and corporatist 'power elite' theories in his study of political power in Gary, Indiana: "Fundamentally, pluralism fails as a description of community political power in Gary because it has no concept to incorporate the reality of monopoly economic power"; while he argues against the corporate liberal historians that "almost without exception the major democratic and social gains of the mass of the people over the course of our national history were won against intransigent capitalist resistance"; Big Steel: Black Politics and Corporate Power in Gary, Indiana (New York: Monthly Review, 1979), 15-19.

Struggled-for restraints

This wide range of restraints presents a further complexity in attempting to locate a clear 'frontier of control' between managerial authority and workers' self-organization.[23] Some restraints over managerial authority owe little to positive worker resistance, and a great deal to management, and as Goodrich found: "There is a significant psychological difference between 'admission' and 'invasion', between control presented to and control seized by a trade union."[24] Since management's influence applies also to the character of shop floor union organization, the difficulties in deducing the extent of management's unilateral shop floor authority are clearly considerable.[25] The approach taken here is to focus on the evidence of shop floor conflict and to try and establish its direction and trend.

The concept of 'struggled-for' restraints is used to describe those issues in management-labour relations which involve contests between managerial authority and worker resistance. The achievement of a struggled-for concession, and its maintenance

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23. Goodrich accepted "discipline and management...are convenient terms for the frontier of control", but insisted "that frontier must must be looked for as a shifting line in a great mass of regulations"; op cit, 62.

24. ibid, 253.

25. William Brown, Robert Ebsworth and Michael Terry, "Factors shaping Shop Steward Organization in Britain", British Journal of Industrial Relations, XVI, no. 2 (1978), 148.

through continual ideological and industrial mobilization of workers against their employer, has different implications for labour relations than a restraint accepted voluntarily or introduced by management to improve the plant's operational efficiency or in response to legislation. The scope and level of formal collective bargaining clearly influence the opportunities available for workers to codify these restraints. Over the last forty years the proportion of struggled-for restraints over managerial authority has reduced in comparison with 'operational' (such as fast, efficient elevators) or 'societal'(such as non-discriminatory hiring) restraints. This development was much less the result of conscious managerial control strategies than of a continuing labour-management conflict in which the accumulation of serious organizational and political defeats eventually eroded labour's ability to sustain its positive pressure.

The shift in the source of restraints on management should not be interpreted as meaning that operational and societal restraints no longer impede managerial authority. Indeed, the possibility of ideological and industrial mobilization by workers in defense of these discretionary restraints is a key factor in constraining management from acting directly in its own short-

term profit-maximising interest. A restraint remains a limitation for management regardless of its origins.[26] The argument here is that the distinction of source is important since it allows an assessment of the strength and strategizing capacity of shop floor unionism as an independent factor influencing managerial response.

The body of restraints on managerial autonomy exercised by workers or through operational or societal pressures is often described as 'job controls'. The approach adopted here, however, suggests such terminology is generally inappropriate. As Price has argued, "the indiscriminate use of the term 'craft control'" which "rightly connotes a series of special conditions and circumstances", should be avoided when it refers to the much more common case of a "tussle between workers' and employers' discipline".[27] But it is important to go still further with this line of argument. If 'control' is to retain its sense as a word that helps the reader locate those who hold power and authority,

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26. Richard Herding, Job Control and Union Structure (Rotterdam: University Press: 1972), Part 1, sets out to demonstrate how the "real interests" of workers are obscured by the "collective-bargaining ideologies" (page 16) that pretend to be advancing the "humanization" of the workplace but instead are promoting "hierachization" and "rationalization" (page 21). But he nonetheless overstates his point by virtually denying that "job control devices" operate to any significant extent to restrain arbitrary management.

27. Richard Price, Masters, unions and men: work control in building and the rise of labour, 1830-1914 (Cambridge: University Press, 1980), 9.

it should not be confused with the broader term 'restraint'. For portrayed below is an account of the ebb and flow of managerial control - at certain times nearly completely unrestrained, at others restrained by changing combinations of forces. To isolate a particular restraint and elevate its significance within the process of continuing struggle as 'control' is to idealize that moment in contrast to the others; and is to deprive the observer of the language and the understanding accurately to describe historical periods in which the social relations of production are actually being challenged. The phrase 'job controls' is loaded with the assumptions of either pre-mass production 'craft control'[29] or of post-mass production 'workers' control'.[30] Although both these ideologies could be found in Chrysler plants during these years, neither dominated workers' collective consciousness. Instead, workers' actions were determined by the movement of a hybrid ideology described here as 'workplace legitimacy'.

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28. Herding approaches this problem by another route. He begins by accepting that "'job control' will refer to all devices of labour union influence on the existence of, the access to, and the performance of operations at particular workplaces in industry" (ibid, page 2) - and then goes on to show that much of what passes for workers' 'job control' is ideologically covering up for measures that advance management interests against workers' interests (page 16, Part I). Those elements of 'job control' which he views as continuing to function in the workers' interests he defines as "offensive 'job controls'(page 44).

29. Price defines "craft control" as "control that was overlain by support systems of tradition or genuine skill"; op cit, 11.

30. Hyman defines "workers' control...in collective terms: the determination by the whole labour force of the nature, methods and indeed purpose of production"; op cit, 180.

Workplace legitimacy and the Rule of Law

Workplace legitimacy is determined by perceived limits of legitimate action; these limits are, in turn, established by the interaction of three key elements: [1] tradition, [2] recent experiences of workplace struggle and [3] workers' politics (ideology and organization).[31] As Armstrong, Goodman and Hyman put it: "Within the overall balance of power, the pattern of workplace rules is not so much created by the ideological raw materials as fashioned from them."[32] The concept has an important implication for changing levels of labour combativity. For if workers' responses to management actions and to movements in the labour market depend crucially on their understanding of what is 'legitimate', then the ability of the employers' world view to shape workers' views of legitimacy becomes a major factor determining worker combativity.[33]

Workplace legitimacy is not the exclusive product of the

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31. Hyman describes this workplace legitimacy as: "a shifting set of traditions and understandings which are never identical in any two work situations... governing workers' relations with one another and with management"; op cit, 25.

32. P J Armstrong, J F B Goodman and J D Hyman, Ideology and Shopfloor Industrial Relations (London: Croom Helm, 1981), 56.

33. Brown, op cit, 168.

employers' world view.[34] It is moulded by a short-term commonsense pragmatism, on which management does have a direct effect,[35] and by a more deeply acquired awareness of rights. This awareness has two sources. First, in the dominant 19th and 20th century political philosophy of political democracy. The denial of full democracy within the workplace relations of the early 1930s and its denial for black workers in the 1960s provided a strong source for the legitimization of industrial action.[36] Second, it arises in the capital-labour relationship itself. Within capitalist employment relations workers are held to be 'free'; but they must sell their labour to live and surrender their 'freedom' in order to find a buyer for their labour.[37] They have the theoretical 'freedom' to move around and to tell the foremen where to get off, while they are simultaneously forced by

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34. Armstrong, Goodman and Hyman, op cit, 39-49.

35. David Montgomery's critical review of the 'new history' of the last 20 years points out three key areas of emphasis that reinforce this point: [1] study of the "moral codes by which workers have sought to regulate their bearing toward each other and toward their bosses on the job"; [2] stress on the source and limits of workers' power in the values and beliefs that impel them to action; [3] examination of workers' sub-cultures, both at work and in the neighbourhood; "To Study the People: the American Working Class", Labor History, 21, no. 4 (Fall 1980), 502.

36. H Gintis argues against the view that workers experienced "false consciousness", suggesting instead that class struggle in the 20th century "took the discourse of liberalism - the discourse of natural rights"; "Communication and Politics: Marxism and the 'Problem' of Liberal Democracy", Socialist Review (1980), 190.

37. Price, ibid, 7, writes: "When workers sell their labour power, they implicitly recognize a certain degree of subordination to the orders and mandates of the employers...But it is precisely from this subordination that many of the problems of industry derive. For employers' authority is never total nor is it ever unambiguously accepted by workers. There is a constant and unremitting resistance and challenge to employers' authority that assumes many different shapes and forms."

the exercise of sanctions to attend one workplace punctually and regularly and to obey that foreman. The uneasy balance between these two ultimately contradictory elements, the rights that rest on an absolute 'freedom', and the immediate requirements of subordination in the workplace, gives rise to the framework of 'legitimate action'. This concept is neither total subordination nor total freedom. Instead it is a changing and often contradictory pattern of workers' rights against managerial authority that are respected and defended within the overall acceptance of management power, what Baldamus has described as the "strange world of intricately mixed, highly organized, and yet morally compulsive expectations".[38]

The concept of workplace legitimacy borrows from Brody's more precise "workplace rule of law" and Slichter's concept of "industrial jurisprudence" but is a more useful way of describing the structural situation of the post-war American labour movement.[39] For while the mushrooming of "contractual rules" (including federal legislation) was obviously a key element influencing worker resistance, the notion of the "rule of law" does not explain why so often workers believed they were justified in taking 'illegal' action outside the contract and

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38. W Baldamus, Efficiency and Effort: An Analysis of Industrial Administration (London: Tavistock, 1961), 125.

39. Brody, op cit, 202; Sumner H Slichter, Union Policies and Industrial Management (Washington DC: Brookings Institute, 1941), 1.

often outside the law. This approach also puts into context Gouldner's finding that "workers usually defined the strike in ethical terms, holding it to be morally justified". He suggested that,

> workers defined their major role obligation as working or production. Their obedience obligations to superiors were residual or auxiliary; at best these were thought of as legitimate demands only insofar as they were necessary to do a particular job.40

The broader notion of workplace legitimacy, which has management and labour constantly and conflictually remaking workplace rules and then penalizing the other side for transgressing them, provides a two-sided view of the labour process.[41]

Workplace legitimacy is seen here as highly malleable, reflecting the mediating influence of tradition and workers' current political experience (in society and in the workplace), and the traditions and political experiences of management.[42] Workers may therefore believe their own actions are legitimate even though they defy the law; or they may collectively defend positions (such as concessions) that appear antagonistic to their collective interests. And they can act for short periods of time

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40. Alvin W Gouldner, Wildcat Strike (Yellow Springs, Ohio: Antioch, 1954), 59, 18.

41. Armstrong, Goodman and Hyman, op cit, 15.

42. Hyman, op cit, 197.

in either way without necessarily altering their awareness of their basic rights or of their basic subordination.[43] Moreover managers may also act in ways that defy the law in the belief that all laws that interfere with managerial authority are illegitimate.[44] The limits of workplace legitimacy result from a two-way exchange between the way workers try to maximise their rights and freedoms and the current managerial control strategy. As Littler argues:

> Actual shop floor behaviour and relationships must be seen... not as consequences of the unilateral imposition by management on a passive workforce of specifications and prescriptions, but a two-way exchange in which an accommodation concerning the maning and relevance of such prescriptions is achieved in exchange for some level of commitment to the existing distribution of authority, and to working objectives.45

Workplace legitimacy customarily reflects ambivalent consciousness: resistance and subordination share the same moment. Which aspect appears to dominate is strongly influenced by workers' awareness of their collective strength. This is a function of history, economics, politics and organization.

Union organization

The third group of issues concerns the role of shop floor and wider union organization and politics in shaping

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43. The 1944-1945 wartime wildcat strikes followed by the majority vote in support of the 'No Strike Pledge' is an obvious example of the compatibility of illegal resistance with acceptance of subordination (see Part Three below).

44. Thus Henry Ford openly defied the Wagner Act in the 1930s; GM and Chrysler did so covertly (see Part Two below).

45. Craig R Littler, The Development of the Labour Process in Capitalist Societies (London: Heinemann, 1982), 42.

consciousness and views of workplace legitimacy. It is argued that workplace organization is first constructed and then maintained by a layer of key individuals.[46] The relative autonomy of the shop floor organization from domination by the international union and by management is the key to understanding its sensitivity to rank and file concerns and demands. But the organizational tradition in the different plants, the political composition and strength of the international union leadership, and the intervention of management interact to influence that autonomy. The concept of organizational independence used in the study must, therefore, be seen as a changing set of ideological positions and actions rather than as a fixed constitution. It is an important concept because it suggests that labour's capacity to develop distinct strategies to represent workers' interests is not simply an ideological question: there is a symmetry between active shop floor participation in union organization and that organization's representation of workers' distinctive interests.

An historical process is at work: management legitimated shop steward organization in an endeavour to defeat unionism. The

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46. Many studies of particular plants have demonstrated this; see, Peter Friedlander, The Emergence of a UAW Local, 1936-1939: A study in Class and Culture (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1975); John G Kruchko, the Birth of a Union Local: The History of UAW Local 674, Norwood, Ohio, 1933-1940 (New York: Cornell University School of Industrial and Labour Relations, 1972). In the British auto industry: Huw Beynon, Working for Ford (Wakefield: EP Publishing, 1975); Henry Friedman and Sander Meredeen, The Dynamics of Industrial Conflict: Lessons from Ford (London: Croom Helm, 1980); Eric Batstone, Ian Boraston and Stephen Frenkel, who posit the development of a crucial quasi-elite group among a vehicle plant's shop stewards; Shop Stewards in Action: The Organization of Workplace Conflict and Accommodation (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977)

success of the sit-down movement contributed to the strengthening of compromising tendencies among the international union leaderships. For many years the history of post-war American labour has been dominated by the myth of a 'labour truce'[47], but the relative strength of the centralized business unions compared to the rank and file membership is only part of the picture. American labour was obliged to exercise its collective potential within and against very powerful managerial control systems, backed by massive power resources in a political and economic atmosphere that gave management great confidence after the outbreak of World War II. In much of industry managerial discretion in the post-war boom allowed workers the opportunity to organize and win certain concessions and establish a new 'workplace legitimacy'. In part, as Kuhn has argued, the shop stewards and committeemen were utilized by foremen "to win back some control of their shops (in matters of discipline, placement, classification, rates, transfers and promotions)"[48]. But the limits of 'workplace legitimacy' were also constantly struggled over; first in a climate of economic expansion and in the late 1950s and late 1970s in periods of sharpening economic pressure.

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47. See David Gordon, Richard Edwards and Michael Reich, Segmented Work, Divided Workers: the historical transformation of labour in the United States (Cambridge: University Press, 1982), 216-9; and for Chrysler's Dodge Main complex itself, Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, Detroit: I do mind dying, A study in urban revolution (New York: St Martin's, 1975), 24, where they write: "on May 2, 1968, 4,000 workers shut down Dodge Main in the first wildcat strike to hit the plant in fourteen years".

48. James W Kuhn, Bargaining in Grievance Settlement: the Power of Industrial Work Groups (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 31.

This struggle explains management's continued hostility to unionism. Kuhn concluded:

> Fractional bargaining, even more than collective bargaining, challenges a deep-rooted concept of the business community that the managers, not the workers, should control the production process... That fractional bargaining allows workers some meaningful control over decisions affecting work and production and that workers might desire such control because they are men as well as workers, are concepts too alien to business thinking to receive much consideration.49.

Management therefore used periods of recession to try to re-establish its economic pressure by trying to re-establish an unrestrained authority. When organizational and ideological tools were available, minorities resisted what Aronowitz calls "the efforts of management to exceed the historically acceptable pace of work".[50] When they were no longer available, a period of working class defensiveness set in, accompanied by declarations of the onset of a "new era" in industrial relations.

Section two critically examines aspects of the current debate about the development of managerial control in America over the last 50 years, and suggests that the lack of concern for the historical dynamic of workers' resistance in the US lies in the political failings of both the right and the left.

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49. ibid, 181-2.

50. Stanley Aronowitz, False Promises: the shaping of American working class consciousness (New York: McGraw Hill, 1973), 409.

II. Issues

Rigid structural determinism will be challenged at various points in the book, so it is helpful to outline briefly some general objections here. Implicit assumptions of national exceptionalism are often made by those who develop theories of managerial control from economic variables. David M Gordon, Richard Edwards and Michael Reich, for example, pose the question which motivated their book as follows:

> Workers and the labour movement in the United States have not yet been able to articulate and advance a program for the resolution of the crisis that defends and furthers not only their own interests but also the general welfare. Why have US workers been so quiescent? [my emphasis, SJ.] 51

Clearly such a question is predicated on an unstated and unexamined model of 'other' countries and their labour movements.[52] But, as Montgomery has pointed out, while "it is quite true...that union structures, leaders and demands have been successfully incorporated into American capitalism time and again. So have workers' parties (reformist and revolutionary alike). co-operatives, and workers' councils here and in

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51. Gordon et al, op cit, 2.

52. The error involved in evoking "an undisclosed model of Other Countries" was put in Pickwickian terms by Edward Thompson in his 1965 polemic, 'The Peculiarities of the English',:
"'And other countries,' said Mr Podsnap remorsefully. 'They do how?' 'They do,' returned Messrs. Anderson and Nairn severely: 'They do - we are sorry to be obliged to say it - in Every Respect Better. Their Bourgeois Revolutions have been Mature. Their Class Struggles have been Sanguinary and Unequivocal. Their Intelligentsia has been Autonomous and Integrated Vertically. Their Morphology has been Typolitically Concrete. Their Proletariat has been Hegemonic.'" EP Thompson, The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays (London: Merlin, 1978), 37.

Europe."[53] Thus Britain, for example, entered the 1979 world recession by electing a radical right-wing government; the working class then collapsed into "quiescence" and in 1983 the same Thatcher administration was re-elected with the lowest Labour share of the working class vote since 1918. What strikes the British observer is that working class "quiescence" and an absence of a "working class agenda" are not exclusively American. If an analytical model is to provide explanatory variables on both sides of the Atlantic, then it must embrace shop floor resistance and accommodation.

The failure to capture the presence of both these two moments in working class history is the principal defect in Segmented Work, Divided Workers. Gordon et al explain working class behaviour in terms of major shifts in managerial control strategies related to long-term business cycles. The years from World War I to World War II were volatile years of transition from the earlier phase of the "homogenization of labour" and "drive" control to the period of "technical" control when "the segmentation of labour forged and reproduced materially based divisions among US workers that inhibited the growth of a unified working-class movement."[54] The three segments of the class are

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53. David Montgomery, "Spontaneity and Organization: some comments", Radical America, 7, no. 6 (Nov-Dec 1973), 74.

54. Gordon et al, op cit, 3.

the "independent primary" (professional, managerial), the "subordinate primary" (semi-skilled blue- and white-collar) and the "secondary" sector (service, peripheral manufacturing, women and blacks).[55] The 1970s are seen as the start of a new period of transition.[56] The analysis brushes aside evidence of continuing shop floor conflict in the post-war period - designated as a "labour truce" - in the same way it ignores evidence that the 1930s "labour upsurge" was much less widespread than has generally been assumed. Labour is viewed as a residual element left over after managers have finished managing. It is either "quiescent" or in rebellion. Evidence that both moments coexisted throughout the last fifty years is ignored because it means that shopfloor conflict has to be brought back to the centre of a theory of industrial relations from which their structural labour market determinism and long-swing capitalist cycles theory has just pushed it. The 'segmented-privileged' argument and its corollary, the assumption of a pure working class consciousness somewhere else, are unhelpful approaches to the problem of changing levels and forms of struggle, and tend to deny the validity of post-war American working class self-activity.[57] Since the activity they do acknowledge is either dismissed as inherently divisive or as utterly determined by outside economic forces, their

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55. ibid, 202-6.

56. ibid, 219-221.

57. ibid, 185-239.

generalizations ultimately fail to come to grips with the dynamic of change that has taken place.

Michael Burawoy makes an important contribution to understanding the political processes whereby the organization of work helps control and indeed shapes workers' consciousness. But he goes on to argue that the "manufacturing of consent" to the subordination of labour to capital is a process that takes place exclusively in the workplace at the point of production. He describes the aim of his study as "to demonstrate how consent is produced at the point of production - independent of schooling, family life, mass media, the state and so forth".[58] While he does subsequently introduce the qualification that this "autonomy" is only "relative", and while his study does recognize that accommodation and resistance are intertwined, neither dissent, nor the possibility of it being mobilized through plant committeemen or union stewards appear at all.[59] It is not difficult to demonstrate workers are "conscious primarily of their immediate work milieu, their everyday experiences"; what Hyman has called "inhibitions against class consciousness in

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58. Michael Burawoy, Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process under Monopoly Capitalism (Chicago: University Press, 1979), xii.

59. In this omission the study is strikingly similar to the classic Charles R Walker and Robert H Guest study, The man on the Assembly Line (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1952), 123-134, whose discussion of "The Worker and the Union" does not refer to committeemen, chief stewards, blue button stewards or how workers resisted the production standards and managerial discipline which came out top on the list of grievances.

everyday industrial relations" do shape workers' world views.[60] But to look only at the "inhibitions" falls into the error of the 'human relations' school pointed out by Child:

> ...a tendency to overlook the role of behavioural determinants which derive from forces beyond the physical limits of the enterprise and which therefore lie beyond managerial regulation.[61]

This study seeks to complement Burawoy's concerns about what in a later work he described as "the politics of production"[62] and to show how important the outside world was in shaping and reshaping the limits of workplace legitimacy. The Roosevelt "rights' explosion", leftism, anti-Communism and Black Power all impacted massively on the key workers and managers to give a distinctive shape to Burawoy's concept of the "factory regime".[63]

An important criticism that can be levelled against Burawoy is that his method tends to determine his findings. Herding explains the absence of extensive research on the frontier of control in American plants as resulting from the more empirical American literature's tendency to isolate issues of control and

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60. Hyman, op cit, 42.

61. Child [1969], op cit, 201-2.

62. Michael Burawoy, "Between the Labor Process and the State: The changing face of Factory Regimes under Advanced Capitalism", American Sociological Review, 48 (October 1983), 587.

63. ibid.

conflict from their "historical dynamics".[64] The sociological snapshot or, in the case of Burawoy's study, the comparison of two snapshots taken at different moments, has apparently satisfied most investigators. This approach illuminates the conformity and continuity that is always present in the single moment of history, and so inevitably leads to the conclusion that conformity and continuity (of management strategy or labour response) are the dominant tendency in labour relations. Burawoy, for example, spent a few months working in the small machine shop of a large steel works in 1975, and drew the conclusion that the piecework system itself created "consent" among his fellow workers to the labour-capital relationship he found intolerable. Stumbling across evidence that the famous post-war Roy participant-observation study had been based on the same firm, Burawoy then had to explain the shift away from the apparent lack of "consent" in 1945. He squared hs circle quite deftly:

> As a consequence of changes in the system of remuneration, management-worker conflict has abated and individualism has increased.[65]

But he ignores many key questions: how much "consent" was also present in 1945? How was that consent generated? How far had patterns of conflict been redistributed within the firm's

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64. Herding, op cit, 2. Making this valuable point at what he believed was a time of growing 'rank and file revolt', Herding himself fell into the trap of viewing consciousness as essentially one-sided. His achievement, however, is to demonstrate the presence of worker resistance within the job, seemingly independent of the formal international union relationship with the employer. It is not surprising that this important book, not included in the bibliographies of Edwards R, op cit, or Gordon et al, op cit, was not written by an American.

65. Burawoy [1979], op cit, 51.

production process as a result of technological and economic developments, creating different responses to management among workers in the machine shop, say, from those directly working on steel manufacture, or in plant maintenance? In what ways and why had the union changed? What impact did the retirement of the 1930s generation of largely white workers and their replacement by blacks have on plant conciousness? Did management structure and ideology change during this thirty year period, and if so how and why? A grasp of the historical dynamics of the shop floor interaction of management and workers is crucial.

The objection that there is no sense of the interaction of management and managed can be made to Braverman, whose important work initiated the current debate about the relatinship of capital, the labour process and labour beliefs. His endeavour to draw "a picture of the working class as it exists, as the shape given to the working population by capital accumulation",[66] however powerful and illuminating, is ultimately flawed by the assumption that it is possible to draw such a picture without the political and organizational experience of the working class being incorporated from the beginning. The critique Lazonick makes of Marx's neglect of "supervisory requirements and existing

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66. See Harry Braverman, Labor and Monopoly Capital: the degradation of work in the Twentieth Century (New York: Monthly Review, 1974), 27. In Braverman's terms it is not possible to separate the study of "a class in itself" from "a class for itself".

managerial structures" in the 19th century cotton industry bears powerfully on Braverman:

> Marx derived his conclusion of the omnipotence of technology in the subjection of labour to capital from an uncritical acceptance of capitalist ideology, instead of using his theoretical framework for an empirical investigation of the interaction of the relations and forces of production in cotton spinning.[my emphasis - SJ.] 67

Managerial control systems do not always correspond with the dominant managerial ideology of the moment.[68] The interaction of workers with management impacts back on management's response to technological change. Workers accept or reject technological change according to a workplace legitimacy which is also shaped by full employment or unemployment, and by the dominant political ideology of the day.[69] Workers are workers in a particular historical context and accept and reject the beliefs of that period according to their own experiences of life, organization and struggle.

Despite the quite different attempts by Gordon et al, Burawoy and Braverman to come to terms with different aspects of

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67. William Lazonick, "Industrial Relations and Technical Change: the Case of the Self-acting Mule", Cambridge Journal of Economics, no. 3 (1979), 238, 259.

68. Andrew L Friedman, Industry and Labour: Class Struggle at Work and Monopoly Capitalism (London: Macmillan, 1977), 80-2. This criticism by Friedman of Braverman is endorsed; but it does not follow that the only choice facing management is "direct control" or "responsible autonomy"; part of the argument below is that pursuance of the former strategy by Chrysler management helped create space for the emergence of the latter.

69. Stephen A Marglin, "What do Bosses do? The origins and functions of Hierarchy in Capitalist Production", The Division of Labour: The Labour Process and Class Struggle in Modern Capitalism ed Andre Gorz (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester, 1978), 17.

the American labour process, they all share a common flaw. They all try to adduce workers' consciousness, the sets of beliefs on which they will act, directly and exclusively from structural determinants - the labour market, the plant or job technology. This approach conflicts with evidence of the wide range and dynamic of consciousness, organization and activity that develops within the same industry among workers and managements facing the same technology and similar labour processes. By assembling evidence at the frontier of interaction between management and managed, a highly complex pattern appears of internally and externally-shaped components that defies gross generalization but still permits the use of sensitive explanatory variables.

Investigations of the historic dynamic of job-level labour relations in US plants are rare. Lichtenstein begins his important study of American labour in World War II by referring to "the vacuum in historical understanding".[70] And Zabala, a sociologist with four years' experience in GM"s California Van Nuys body shop, opens his recent doctoral thesis with more assurance that would be justified from a British author:

> The industrial relations literature is devoid of rigorous studies of the behavioural underpinnings of micro collective bargaining or of the impact of trade unionism on the formation and consciousness of American workers.71

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70. Nelson Lichtenstein, Labor's War at Home: The CIO in World War II, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 2.

71. Craig Zabala, "Collective Bargaining at UAW Local 645, General Motors Assembly Division, Van Nuys, California, 1976-1982" (PhD thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1983), 1.

Why has there been a neglect of the dynamics of post-war shop floor conflict? In part the lack of investigation is because of a narrow focus on deceptively similar formal institutionalized bargaining procedures; in part it results from a reliance on the US Bureau of Labor Statistics strike data that under-reports stoppages, and is not particularly sensistive to important inter-firm differences.[72]

The most important element leading to the assumption of similarity has been, however, a political neglect by both the established American academics and, until very recently, by the left as well. First, managerial 'welfarism' in the 1910s and 1920s[73] spawned industrial relations experts in the 1930s and

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72. The BLS data is "based on all work stoppages involving six workers or more and lasting at least a full day or shift". In a system where striking was largely illegal during the term of the contract, this cut-off point of a whole shift out on strike under-reports the actual number of strikes by a much larger proportion than is true of the similar cut-off point in the UK labour statistics. This is made clear by contrasting company data from Chrysler and GM which indicates a total of 548 strikes in those two companies alone in the non-contract-year 1957 with the 178 recorded by the BLS for the whole motor vehicle and equipment industry. The BLS insensitivity to inter-firm differences is highlighted in its breakdown by name of firm of large strikes involving 10,000 workers or more. This raises the strike frequency of General Motors whose labour force is more than four times the size, for example, of Chrysler. The reality according to the companies' own data is very different. Thus while between 1959 and 1978 the annual average large-strike frequency rate of Chrysler and GM as measured by the BLS was both 0.03 strikes per 1,000 hourly-paid workers, the all-strike frequency rates kept by the companies showed Chrysler at 0.46, nearly four times greater than GM's annual average frequency of 0.12 strikes per 1,000 workers. Company data: Chrysler and GM Labor Relations Departments; BLS data: BLS, Collective Bargaining in the Motor Vehicle and Equipment Industry, Report 574, September 1979.

73. Brody, op cit, 48-81.

1940s who saw themselves as a part of the managerial personnel function: as advisors to management on the control of labour. In 1941 Slichter's influential study Union Policies and Industrial Management made this clear:

> Protecting the status of management and preserving its essential prerogatives have not been a sufficiently definite objective of either union or employers policy in building up our system of industrial jurisprudence...
> The workers, though they have an interest in preventing arbitrary decisions by management, also need to have the management able to maintain reasonable efficiency.74

Twenty years later he made his managerial aims still more explicit, writing that "in case of conflict" between the needs of management and the workers, the book's "orientation is provided by the goals of management".[75] Most social scientists who examined American industrial relations in the 1950s and 1960s assumed that open conflict was bad or unnecessary or both, and that the tendency of union organizations to emulate the oligarchic structure of business was a necessary or a positive good.[76] In Britain, where the personnel function was predominantly 'women's work' before 1939, and industrial relations and personnel specialists did not achieve significant status within management until the 1960s,[77] research, although

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74. Slichter, op cit, 578.

75. Sumner H Slichter, James E Healy and E Robert Livernash, The Impact of Collective Bargaining on Management (Washington DC: Brookings Institute, 1960), 6.

76. Lichtenstein, op cit, 4.

77. H A Clegg, The Changing System of Industrial Relations in Great Britain (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), 126-8.

strongly influenced by American 'human relations', did not have to justify itself in quite the same utilitarian way. Neither did it have to bow its head before the obligatory altar of anti-Communism[78]. It could be more concerned with the causes of conflict and less with its resolution.

Second, the post-war isolation of the Communist Party (USA) and the dominance of Maoism and neo-Maoist ideas within the American New Left reinforced assumptions about the impotence of the American working class. The industrial proletariat, wrote the influential philosopher Marcuse in the 1960s, was "no longer qualitatively different from any other class and hence no longer capable of creating a qualitatively different society".[79] To those who accepted this thesis questions of differentiation within this class carried little interest.

Instead of asking the detailed questions about changing patterns of worker and managerial conflict that have been forced

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78. "Do not mistake us," pleaded sociologists Scott and Homans in 1947, "there are communists in Detroit, and communists are a danger to our form of government, but some of the executives were, in effect, using communism as an excuse for not looking a second time at the thing they had on their hands (the wartime strikes)"; Jerome F Scott and George C Homans, "Reflections on the Wildcat Strikes" American Sociological Review, 12, no. 3 (June 1947), 283.

79. Cited in Richard Polenberg, One Nation Divisible: Class, Race and Ethnicity in the United States since 1938 (New York: Viking, 1980), 225.

on British academics,[80] Braverman and his critics Burawoy and Gordon *et al* appear to take the process of management for granted. They credit management with the capacity to conceive, develop and execute a universally effective labour control strategy. As Littler has pointed out, they look for "a total solution... a conceptual search in order to pin-point the magic strategy that successfully stablized capital/labour relations".[81] Historians like Preis and Brecher tend to make the reverse error, suggesting that an unproblematic 'heroic' working class movement of the 1930s was somehow 'betrayed' by forces from within its own ranks in the 1940s - by the 'Stalinists' and/or by Reuther and/or by prosperity.[82] The moment these impressions capture - the moment of consent when subordination is accepted - is not difficult to theorize around. But the complexity of continued worker resistance at the heart of the labour process has

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80. David Cox, "Living and Studying with Capitalism: Some comments on the development of British Industrial Sociology", Organisation of Sociologists in Polytechnics and Cognate Institutions, Paper no. 5 (Hatfield: Hatfield Polytechnic, 1978), 2-6.

81. Littler, *op cit*, 3; Stephen Wood sees the Friedman and Richard Edwards' approaches as also presenting "management as omniscient, conspiratorial and able, at least for a certain period of time, to get its own way - that is, to solve successfully its problem of control"; *The Degradation of Work? Skill, Deskilling and the Labour Process* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), 16.

82. Art Preis, *Labor's Giant Step: Twenty years of the CIO*, (New York: Pathfinder, 1972); Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!* (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett, 1972).

not been tackled. This neglect has meant that although many Detroit radicals who worked in the auto industry from the 1940s to the 1970s were aware of major differences in shop floor traditions, struggle and levels of managerial control between Chrysler, GM and Ford,[83] their evidence and its implications for a theory of managerial control has been largely ignored.[84] The challenge is to present the historical dynamic of American working class experience in such a way as to embrace both consent within resistance and resistance within conformity without idealizing workers by viewing these components of consciousness as incompatible.

Chapter 2 suggests how this can be attempted in a longitudinal study of one important company and its major plant.

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83. Interviews by the author with Art Fox (Ford) and Pete Kelly (GM) in 1973; with Edie Fox (Chrysler) in 1981; with Martin Glaberman (GM) in 1982; and with John Anderson (GM) in 1981 and 1982.

84. Recent important studies not cited elsewhere include: David Noble, America by Design: Science, Technology and the Role of Corporate Capitalism (New York: Alfred A Kempf, 1977); Andrew Zimbalist, ed., Case Studies in the Labor Process (New York: Monthly Review, 1979). Some of the most interesting appear to have been triggered largely by the contradictions raised by worker resistance and organization during the Second World War: see Nelson Lichtenstein, "Auto Worker Militancy and the Structure of Factory Life, 1937-1955", Journal of American History, September 1980; Martin Glaberman, Wartime Strikes: the struggle against the no-strike pledge in the UAW during World War II, (Detroit: Bewick, 1980); Ruth Milkman, "Redefining women's work: The sexual division of labor in the auto industry during World War II", Feminist Studies, vol 8, No 2, Summer 1982.

CHAPTER 2

WHY CHRYSLER?

Chapter 2 first outlines the methodology and sources used in the study. It then gives an overview of Chrysler's exceptional strike rate and of the development of the international UAW's bargaining strategies. Finally it poses the questions that introduce the narrative parts of the book.

I. Methodology and Sources

The important debate about the way in which management exercises control over the labour process has largely dictated the methodology employed in this study. The theories of managerial control exercised by separating the conception of work tasks from its execution (Braverman), by choosing a direct control or responsible autonomy strategy (Friedman), by a workplace-based relative autonomy (Burawoy), or by being constrained to adopt a technical or bureaucratic control system through the impact on the labour market of long-term economic swings (Gordon et al), raise hypotheses that can only be effectively tested in a specific historical context. Yet even before this debate focused

concern on the relationship of managerial strategy to shop floor industrial relations, Child had already argued that organizational decision-making was an "essentially political process", and that the "strategic choice" available to power-holders "extends to the context within which the organization is operating, to the standards of performance against which the pressure of economic constraints has to be evaluated, and to the design of the organization's structure itself".[1] Thurley and Wood recently developed this provisional research framework in two directions: first to focus on the specific linkages between business and industrial relations policy; and second to critically examine claims that all acts of industrial relations management qualify for the description 'strategy'. Breaking down some of the issues involved in trying to establish a relationship between business strategy and industrial relations strategy they suggest the following key theoretical and empirical research questions:

> Theoretical questions:
> How far can the actual choice of business strategy be explained in terms of the 'rational' choice of managers given certain structures and conditions?
> What links can be deduced between business strategy and industrial relations?
> What are the organizational conditions which allow and encourage 'strategic thinking' among managers?
> Empirical questions:
> Which structural constraints on management and which structured conditions in any society are more important in shaping managerial thinking and action?
> Is there evidence to show the development of 'strategic thinking' in industrial relations in large organizations?2

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1. John Child, "Organizational Structure, Environment and Performance: the role of Strategic Choice", Sociology, 6, no. 1 (June 1972), 1-2.

2. Thurley and Wood, op cit, Table 18.2, 202.

These questions lead to three distinct, although linked, areas of investigation: [1] managerial control over the labour process and constraints derived from workers' collective organization;[2] the constraints upon [1] exercised by management structure and business strategy; and [3] the constraints on both [1] and [2] provided by wider market and political processes. In his study of the Brazilian auto industry, Humphrey has suggested three groups of conditions "outside the workplace" that "crucially influence management control strategies": the supply of labour (including its political, ethnic and religious dimensions); labour legislation; and the form and extent of union organization and activity.[3] To these must be added a fourth crucial condition:the form and history of management organization and activity. It is then possible to endorse Humphrey's argument that a factory study can become the basis of generalizations about capital-labour relations in society as a whole.

> When these influences are taken into account, the factory is no longer seen as a subsystem largely independent of the wider society. Rather, it becomes a site at which the relations between labor and capital as a whole are brought to bear on the particular terrain of concrete labor processes and concrete managerial practices.4

The research method adopted here is an historical reconstruction of the industrial relations pattern in a single plant. Detailed surveys of the industrial relations systems in single plants are

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3. John Humphrey, Capitalist Control and Workers' Struggles in the Brazilian Auto Industry (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), 8-9.

4. ibid.

a recognized approach,[5] but this study is trying to understand the dynamics of change, so it has taken one further step. It presents a factory micro-historical account over a fifty-year period and so tries to overcome the weakness of most industrial relations studies that are too close to one situation and of most historical studies that are not close enough.

A longitudinal historical section of Chrysler and Dodge Main has several advantages. First, three generations of autoworkers and their managers worked in the plant during the period covered. Between 100,000 and 200,000 different men and women had all or parts of their working lives shaped within Dodge Main's factory walls. By taking the long view and narrowing the focus to one plant over such a long period of time detailed consideration can be given to the process of change in their lives. A smaller plant than the average 20,000-30,000 strong Hamtramck-based complex would not have polled so many experiences; while the larger River Rouge is both already better known and, as a result of the idiosyncracies of Henry Ford I, is significantly less typical in the 1930s of the general development of unionism than was Chrysler and Dodge Main.[6] Second, the selection of a plant as central to Chrysler's business activities as Dodge Main that employed between 10% and 30% of its entire workforce, allows top

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5. James W Kuhn, op cit; Batstone, Boraston and Fenkel, op cit; Beynon, op cit.

6. Work in progress on the River Rouge plant and UAW Local 600 by Nelson Lichtenstein should provide a valuable comparative study to the present one of Dodge Main.

management's company-wide policy to be fairly closely monitored.

Third, since Chrysler was America's tenth largest corporation for most of this period, and a key "core" firm in the post-war economy before it made America's biggest-ever loss of more than $1 billion in 1979, it is possible to make useful intra-firm comparisons with the other major automakers, General Motors and Ford. The comparative element is important because similar changes in technology and the business climate can be shown to have impacted differently at Chrysler than at GM or Ford, highlighting the differences in managerial and shop floor responses. MacDonald's twenty-year-old study of collective bargaining in the US auto industry had already observed that "under collective bargaining... differences in labor practises were in large part attributable to the differences in the judgment, skill and foresight exercised by respective managements". By putting Chrysler under this microscope it is possible to go further and suggest reasons for MacDonald's "differences in the quality of management".[7]

Finally, the concrete historical study of what Maitland calls "processes at the micro level",[8] also tests the relevance

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7. Robert M MacDonald, Collective Bargaining in the Automobile Industry: A study of Wage Structures and Competitive Relations (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 396-7, 400.

8. Ian Maitland, The Causes of Industrial Disorder: A Comparison of a British and a German Factory (London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul, 1983), 108.

of the managerial control hypotheses outlined above and the value of the conceptual categories advanced in Chapter 1: that there is an important distinction between managerial power and managerial authority; that struggled-for restraints play a key role in creating the workplace legitimacy that limits managerial authority; and that shop floor organizational independence from both management and the international union is necessary to sustain those restraints. As Friedlander argues, a single-plant study allows "a concreteness" lacking in both institutional and populist/syndicalist approaches.[9]

Sources

The sources available for the study present another reason to describe it as an historical reconstruction rather than 'history'. For while the archives of Dodge Local 3, now at Wayne State University's Walter Reuther Library, were a very rich source for the researcher, financial stringency at Chrysler Corporation had closed management's archives. The same crisis brought, however, a useful bonus: following the interest aroused by the biggest-ever federal bailout, Chrysler's management structure and business policy came under scrutiny in two very useful studies by American auto industry journalists: Bailout by

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9. Friedlander, op cit, 111.

R. Stuart, and the still more substantial Going for Broke: the Chrysler Story by Michael Moritz and Barrett Seaman. These accounts, together with the relevant archive material in the Reuther Library, and the studies of the period by Irving Bernstein, Sidney Fine, Nelson Lichtenstein and Howell Harris, allowed the reconstruction of Chrysler management's organizational structure, politics and business policy given in the study.

The focus of the study on the frontier of managerial shop floor authority lead to a major concern with strikes as a measurable indicator of conflict. It was greatly assisted here by two series of strike statistics made available to the author by Chrysler Corporation and by General Motors. These ran from 1940 to 1980 and recorded the hours lost in both authorized and unauthorized strikes that were reported to their respective corporate labour relations departments. Combined with yearly average employment figures, fairly sensitive strike frequency and loss ratio statistics could be developed, providing an important empirical basis for comparisons between the levels of open industrial conflict between the two companies.

The reconstruction of management labour relations policy and the availability of these indexes of labour conflict were the starting point for a detailed examination of the relationship between this policy and the changing level of conflict. This

required extensive use of the Dodge Local 3 collection referred to above. The material researched included the very valuable and almost complete run of the Dodge Main News. This local newsheet began as the Dodge Bulletin during the 1937 strike and appeared on a twice-weekly basis from then until the plant was closed. The collection also included a complete set of local and local executive board minutes dating from the attempt to build an American Federation of Labor (AFL) local in the plant in 1933, and a set of minutes of stewards' meetings from 1937 to 1940. The correspondence files of the Local 3 president and recording secretary and the local's grievance files from 1950 until 1972 were also used, as were the miscellaneous Local 3 boxes that included material on the 1930s and on DRUM. The only restriction here was the library's ten-year closed access rule, so it was not possible to obtain as detailed observations for the period since 1972 as it was for the period before. Important additional archive material was also made available to me by Ed Liska, Local 3 president from 1968 to 1972: a nearly complete set of early DRUM bulletins, a daily diary he kept of the events around the May 1968 DRUM strike, and his personal files of notes on assembly grievances from 1969 to 1972.

Other important UAW collections accessed at the Walter Reuther library were the following: Chrysler Department, Research Department, Local 51, Local 7, Local 889 and the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists. Individual collections that were very useful included: Walter Reuther, Richard Frankensteen, John

Zaremba, Harry Ross, George Addes, Emil Mazey, Arthur Hughes, Frank Marquart and Bernard Hoffman. Together, these archival sources provided a mass of material that was then placed in context through contemporary, mainly Detroit-based newspaper accounts of the events, through reading many of the oral histories taped twenty years ago for Wayne State University's labour archive library, and through conducting additional oral interviews myself. The most useful oral histories accessed were those of John Zaremba, Harry Ross, Frank Marquart, Richard Frankensteen and Arthur Hughes. Others consulted included: Kenneth Bannon, Jack Beni, Joseph Ferris, Bert Foster, Martin Jenson, Norman Matthews, Lew Michener, Patrick O'Malley, Nat Ganley and Carl Haessler.

A contemporary assessment of industrial relations developments in the auto industry was provided in a series of interviews with corporate executives conducted in June 1982: at General Motors (GM) with Fred Haubold, International Labor Relations Director, John Maciarz, Public Relations Executive; at Ford: Ernie Savoie, Labor Relations Director, Jack Barnes, Economic Analysis Director; and at Chrysler Dick Clancy, Labor Relations Executive, and Bob Heath, Public Relations Executive.

The biggest problem for the present research into the labour process and shop floor organization with these interviews by Jack Skeel, is that the questions he asked were primarily aimed at soliciting replies about the <u>international</u> UAW. The result is

that the word "steward", for example, only appears once or twice, and he treated the sinews of shop floor organization as unproblematic. This omission was partly rectified in a small number of additional interviews conducted by the author in 1981 and 1982: with former Dodge Main workers Gertrude Nalezty, Edie Fox, Ed Liska and Robert Jenson, and with former Dodge Main personnel manager Dick Clancy. These interviews were in turn assisted greatly by the earlier research conducted by the author on a joint oral history with John W Anderson, a Detroit autoworker from 1927 to 1966. This study, covering in depth the life of a rank and file autoworker who was based in the GM Fleetwood Cadillac plant for thirty years from 1936, helped considerably in exploring the central themes of the present research: how and why was Chrysler different? And what does this difference tell us about the processes which shaped the wider American working class?

II. Chrysler strikes: 1937-1980

Strikes are one measurable indicator of conflict about the limits of workplace subordination of workers by management.[10] Chrysler experienced significantly more large and more unauthorized strikes per employee than General Motors and Ford from 1937 to 1958. These two decades of high strike frequency contrast with a much reduced strike rate during the 1960s and 1970s, but even then Chrysler workers were on strike more often than GM or Ford workers.

Large Strikes

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) lists individual strikes involving over 10,000 workers in the motor vehicle and motor vehicle equipment industry from 1937 to 1978.[11] Table 1 aggregates this large-strike data by company, providing a crude indicator of the differences between Chrysler, Ford and GM. During the four decades considered, Chrysler experienced over twice as many big strikes as Ford, and slightly more than GM - despite having a workforce smaller than Ford and less than a quarter of GM's size:

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10. K G J C Knowles, Strikes - a Study in Industrial Conflict (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952), 210; Richard Hyman, Strikes (London: Fontana, rev.ed. 1977), 112.

11. BLS, 148 (October 1959), Table 3, 5-11; BLS, 574 (September 1979), Table 2, 6-12.

TABLE 1
LARGE AUTO STRIKES, INVOLVING OVER 10,000 WORKERS, 1937-1978

Company	Large auto strikes				
	1937-1958		1959-1978		Total
	No.	aFrequency	No.	Frequency	
Chrysler	20	.26	3	.03	23
General Motors	10	.03	11	.03	21
Ford	5	.04	4	.03	9
Briggs	8				
Hudson	10				
Packard	3				
I. Harvester	2		2		4
Studebaker	2				
Kaiser-Frazer	1				
Multi-corporation	2				
American Motors			3		
	63		23		

SOURCE: BLS Reports 148, 574; company employment data.
NOTES: a. Frequency rate is based on the number of large strikes per 1,000 hourly paid workers. The companies average hourly employment is calculated on company data for 1940-1958.

While Ford, GM and International Harvester experienced large strikes right across the four decades, Chrysler's large strikes were concentrated before 1959 and its large strike frequency rate dropped to the industry 'norm' after 1959.[12]

12. There is a danger in over-reliance on the large strike data since Chrysler and Ford concentrated their productive facilities at Dodge Main and the River Rouge from the 1930s to the 1950s. This will clearly have raised their propensity to have strikes involving large numbers of workers, since the effect of small departmental or sectional strikes will naturally have a speedier multiplier effect on lay-offs (the numbers directly and indirectly involved are not segregated in the BLS statistics) than in the smaller and more geographically dispersed GM plants, where only the Chevrolet Division in Flint is in any sense directly comparable to Dodge Main or the River Rouge. The frequency rates are also not strictly comparable since a higher proportion of Chrysler and Ford hourly paid workers were exclusively employed in automobile assembly than was the case in GM. They can therefore only be relied upon to provide a trend.

Authorized and unauthorized strikes

Chrysler and GM count UAW-authorized strikes separately from unauthorized ones, and can provide the numbers of man-hours lost from 1940 to 1980.[13] Table 2 outlines a pattern familiar to observers of the British car industry: all but 2% of Chrysler's recorded strikes between 1940 and 1980 were unauthorized:

TABLE 2
WORK STOPPAGES AT CHRYSLER'S US LOCATIONS, 1940-1980

Five yearly averages	Annual Average Number of strikes		Annual Average Manhours lost in strikes	
	Unauthorized	Authorized	Unauthorized	Authorized
1940-44	110	0	485,882	0
1945-49	120	a	1,118,437	a
1950-54	128	b	1.644,510	b
1955-59	289	1.2	2,471,528	1,458,212
1960-64	14	2.2	81,394	284,891
1965-69	46	1.6	359,975	514,749
1970-74	62	4.6	308,813	1,174,001
1975-79	33	6	215,179	120,532
1980	3	0	39,269	0
TOTAL 1940-1980:	4,009	c81	33,467,861	80,964,399

SOURCE: Company data.
NOTES: [a] One authorized strike in 1948 with 9,572,968 manhours lost. [b] Two authorized strikes: a 104 day strike in 1950 with 53,614,805 manhours lost (two thirds of the total manhours lost in authorized stoppages over the whole 41 years), and one in 1952 with 14,700 manhours lost. [c] There were only three authorized strikes [see notes (a) and (b)] from 1940 to 1956. From 1957 to 1980 there were authorized strikes in every year except 1965, 1972, 1975 and 1980.

13. Chrysler Corporation, October 26 1981, letter to author; GM, September 15 1982, letter to author. On the plausible assumption that these aggregated plant-level reports to corporate headquarters do record accurately the International UAW-authorized strikes, then although the remainder are more subject to the subjective interests of local management to show up or cover up stoppages, they do provide a better index of the unauthorized strikes than the more arbitrary method of assuming that strikes which last three days or less "during term of agreement" were by definition unconstitutional, as P K Edwards, was obliged to do; Strikes in the United States, 1881-1974 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), 180.

Unauthorized strikes predominated during the 1940s and 1950s, with a dramatic drop in 1959 followed by a small but distinct recovery from 1966 providing four lesser peaks of strike activity - in 1968, 1970, 1973 and 1977. Two thirds of all strikes authorized against Chrysler from 1940 to 1980 occurred in that same ten year period. The sharp break in strike trend in 1959 is repeated for man-hours lost. Eighty-four per cent of the 33.5 million man-hours lost in unauthorized strikes over all four decades were lost between 1940 and 1958.[14] The year 1959 was also a turning point in the UAW's willingness to sanction official action against Chrysler outside of the national contract negotiations.[15]

Chrysler's strike frequency rate (the frequency with which strikes occurred per 1,000 Chrysler manual employees), shown in Table 3, confirms a dramatic change in strike pattern after 1959:

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14. So were 85.9% of the total 81 million man-hours lost in authorized strikes - a reflection of the massive losses in the major contract strikes of 1948 and 1950.

15. These negotiations took place annually until 1947 when the first longer-term agreement was signed. Subsequently, long-term contracts have been negotiated in 1948, 1950, 1955, 1958, 1961, 1964, 1967, 1970, 1973, 1976, 1979 and 1982. The 1982 contract was only signed in January 1983 after a strike by Canadian Chrysler workers. Before 1958 the UAW only authorized non-contract-year strikes twice, in 1952 and 1957. But between 1959 and 1980, while authorized strikes took place in all seven contract-years (losing 6.5m manhours), the UAW also authorized strikes in a further 11 non-contract-years (causing Chrysler to lose 21.1m manhours).

TABLE 3

CHRYSLER AND GENERAL MOTORS, STRIKE FREQUENCY RATES PER 1000 HOURLY PAID WORKERS, 1940-1979

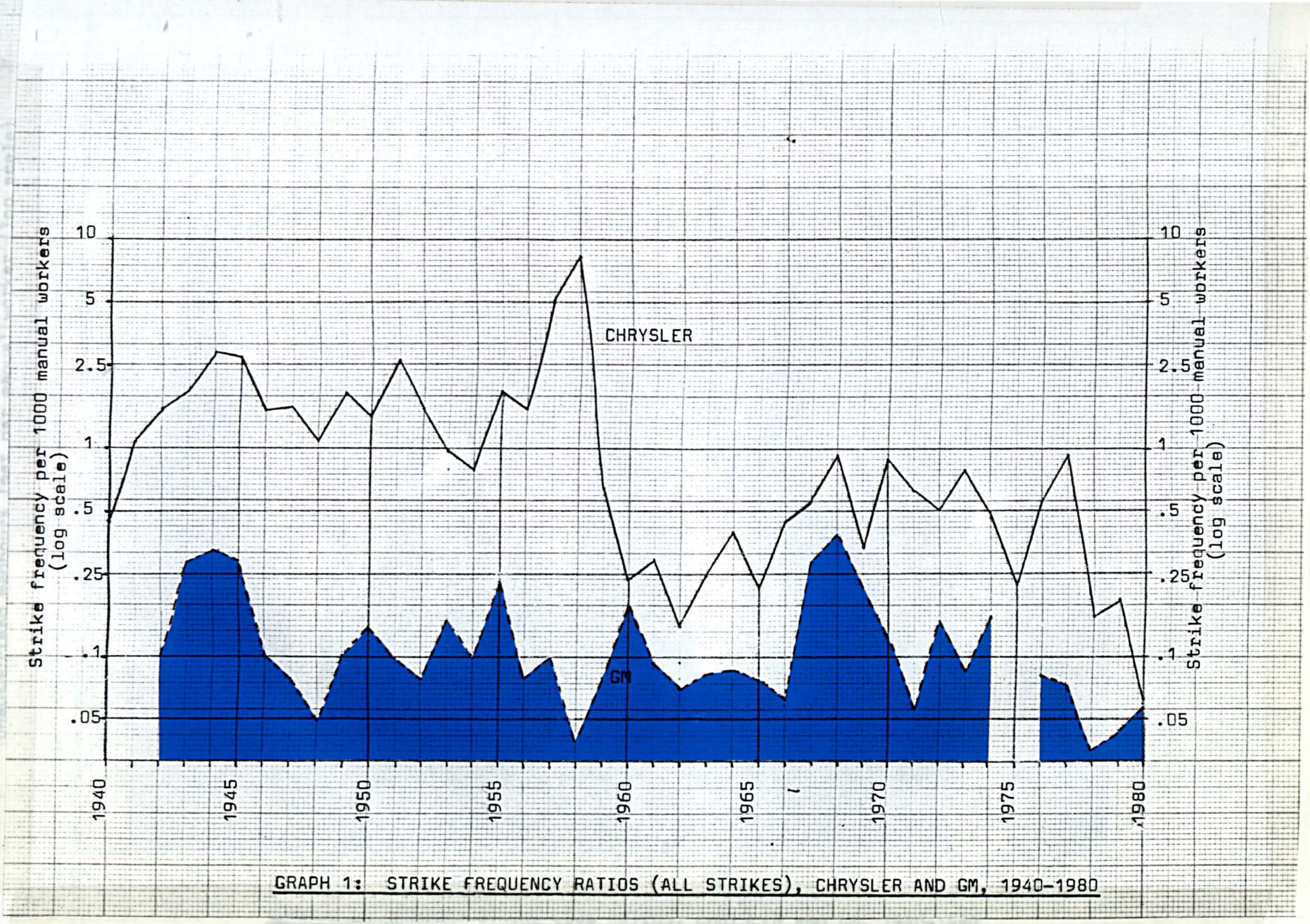
Five yearly averages	Chrysler		General Motors[a]	
	Unauthorized strikes/1000	All strikes frequency	Unauthorized strikes/1000	All strikes frequency
1940-44	1.57	1.57	.24	.24
1945-49	1.74	1.75	.13	.13
1950-54	1.47	1.47	.11	.11
1955-59	3.50	3.52	.10	.11
1960-64	.23	.26	.09	.10
1965-69	.48	.50	.09	.21
1970-74	.62	.66	.07	.11
1975-79	.35	.41	.02	.06

SOURCE: Company data.

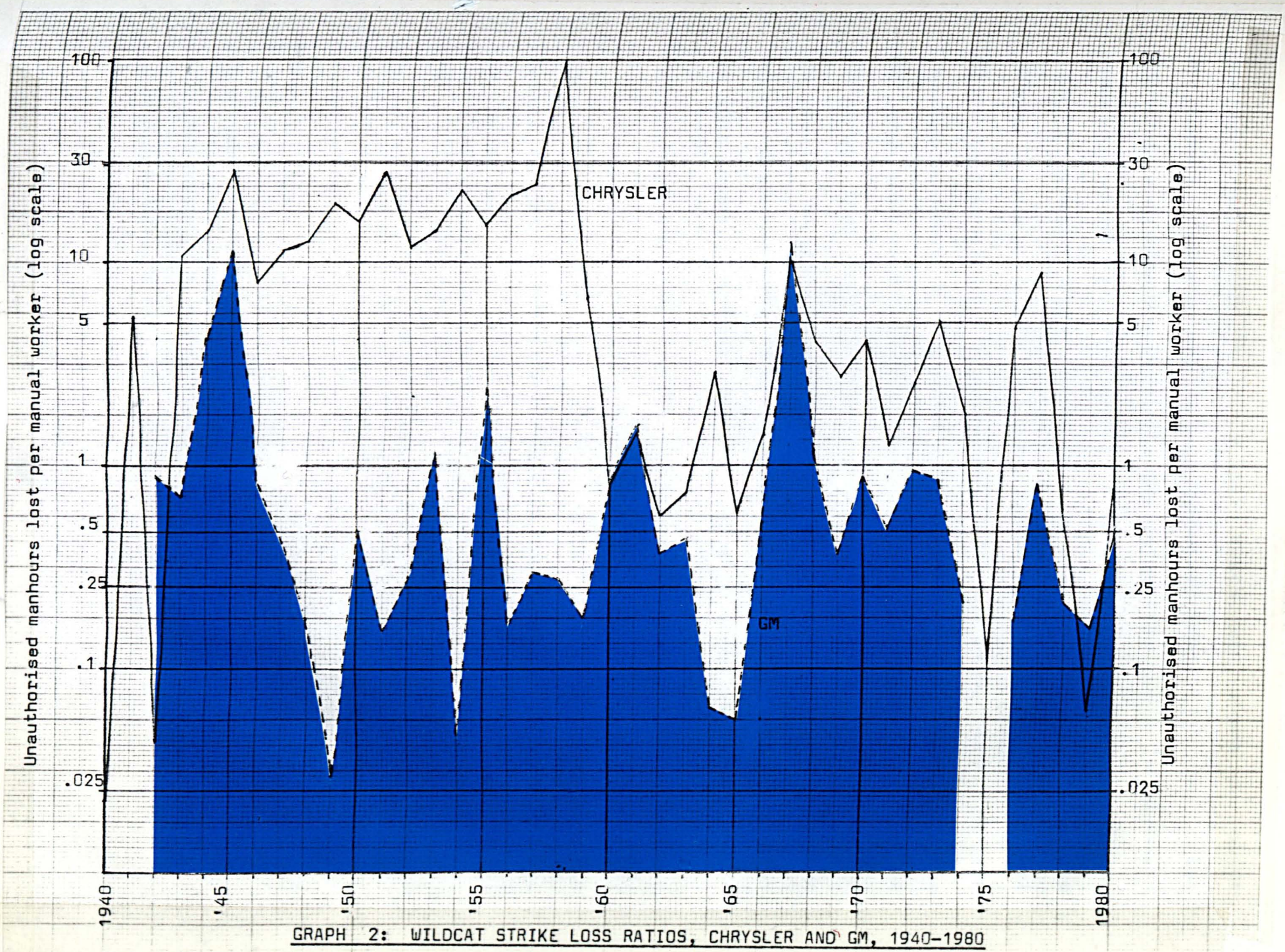
NOTE: a.GM data not available for 1940,1941 and 1975. The averages for 1940-44 and 1975-79 are therefore calculated on less than the full five year spans.

The average annual unauthorized strike frequency was five times higher in the 20 years from 1940 than in the 20 years from 1960. From 1941 to 1958 Chrysler's all-strike frequency only fell below one per 1,000 hourly-paid workers in two years (1953 and 1954); while after 1958 it only reached 0.9 per 1,000 twice (in 1968 and 1977). At GM, by contrast, the average unauthorized frequency started at a much lower level and was merely halved over the last two decades.

Two graphs on the following pages demonstrate different aspects of the divergent strike rates between Chrysler and GM since 1940. Figure 1 graphs the Chrysler and GM



GRAPH 1: STRIKE FREQUENCY RATIOS (ALL STRIKES), CHRYSLER AND GM, 1940–1980



GRAPH 2: WILDCAT STRIKE LOSS RATIOS, CHRYSLER AND GM, 1940–1980

strike frequencies on an annual basis and shows a major divergence between the two companies from 1955 to 1960. Chrysler's unauthorized strike loss ratio (the number of manhours lost per worker) graphed in Figure 2, highlights the contrasting record between Chrysler and GM from 1946 to 1959 and the late 1950s hiatus at Chrysler: the unauthorized loss rate only fell below 10 hours a year twice between 1941 and 1958, and only once reached 10 hours in the years that followed. The narrative parts of the book explain the movement of the pattern of conflict at Chrysler from unauthorized to authorized strikes, and then to virtually no strikes, in relation to changes in management and union organization. What part did the international union play in this process, and how did its influence grow over time?

III. UAW bargaining: An overview

Shop floor organization in the Big Three auto makers and in their different plants reflected both the dynamic of particular managements and the changing policy and degree of intervention of the international United Automobile Workers of America (UAW). To the extent that it had the capacity to predetermine a policy and then consistently implement it, the UAW's bargaining strategy from its foundation in 1935 to America's entry into World War II was largely to win and then retain union recognition. In this period local organization was only controlled very loosely by the international. From 1941 to the late 1950s, under both presidents R J Thomas (1939-1946) and Walter Reuther (1946-1970) it focused on standardising and improving wages and non-wage benefits in the major companies' plants. During these years the International Executive Board (IEB) only rarely authorized any local strikes, and the immediate struggle over shop floor managerial authority was effectively abandoned by the international: plant-by-plant and section-by-section strikes did break out but they were unauthorized and usually illegal.[16]

16. I.Howe and B J Widick commented on the wave of widlcat strikes that occurred against speed-up at all three major automakers in the first quarter of 1949: "These wildcats were due to speedups which, the union charged, had made working conditions intolerable. For the UAW, however, they represented a serious problem and threatened to upset its entire 1949 wage-and-pension strategy"; The UAW and Walter Reuther (New York: Random, 1949), 182.

The consequences for shop floor and local union organization of this simultaneous centralization of collective bargaining and neglect of job conditions by the international varied according to the size and tradition of the different locals. Where a local was small or politically subservient to the ruling UAW faction and so highly dependent upon the international when conflict developed with its management, then the effect of the establishment of collective bargaining at international level was debilitating for local union organization. As Hyman has argued: "The ability to negotiate with the employer(s) over a significant range of issues represents a source of power within trade unionism: centralised bargaining over the main substantive conditions of employment normally consolidates the control of the central negotiators over the union membership."[17] Only in particularly large plants or where strong shop steward or left political traditions prevailed was there a countervailing power source which could turn the international's neglect of local working conditions to its own advantage by claiming them as a legitimate area for its own independent activity. For the most part, the 1949 observation by Howe and Widick that because of "the changed relationship between the union and the corporations...the steward, while still important in the shop, seemed to be less powerful in the union than he had been in the thirties",[18] appears close to the mark.

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17. Hyman [1975], op cit, 116.

18. Howe and Widick, op cit, 239-240.

Following the 1955 achievement of contract standardisation and what was effectively industry-wide joint-employer bargaining, the terrain of bargaining shifted. The expansion of the industry, the desire of management to introduce automation and tighter production standard procedures and the resulting multiplication of grievances, created pressures on mangement to extend formal bargaining at the plant level whether the UAW liked it or not. So, partly to retain control over the local agreements that were becoming commonplace, and partly because the companies pushed them as supplements rather than alternatives to the national contracts, the Reuther administration agreed, experimentally in 1958, and throughout the industry in 1961, to allow locals to negotiate formal agreements with their managements. But this was not devolution of centralized union control: the agreements had to be ratified by the international and lasted the full term of the national agreement.[19]

The extension of the UAW-authorized area of bargaining had an unintended consequence: the international found itself obliged, not merely to authorize local strikes at the termination

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19. Jack Stieber argues that a "major difference" beween the British and American industrial relations systems, is in the nature of these supplementary agreements: in the United States, "these supplementary agreements are negotiated by local union officials or committees, usually assisted by one or more full-time union representatives, and must adhere to the standards negotiated in the overall agreement at the industry or association level. Furthermore, the local agreements must usually be approved by the national union as must a strike over failure to reach a settlement." This accounts for the greater frequency of authorized plant-level strikes in the US than in Britain, suggests Stieber; "Unauthorized Strikes under the American and British Industrial Relations Systems", British Journal of Industrial Relations, 6, no. 2 (July 1968), 235-7.

of the national contracts, but also to authorize larger numbers of local strikes on strikeable issues that were effectively in defence of these local contracts. This spin-off effect of the greater participation by the international in local bargaining impacted on General Motors and Ford as well as on Chrysler. At GM only 10 strikes had been authorized between 1942 and 1956, while in the five years after 1961 the international authorized 54. At Chrysler, with less than a quarter as many separate locations, the totals of authorized strikes rose from three between 1942 and 1956 to 11 between 1962 and 1967 and 13 between 1968 and 1972.[20] Plant-level conflict was increasingly channelled through the international - a tendency which became still more apparent after 1970 when the UAW ran deeply into debt in a nationwide strike against GM.

The heavy costs incurred in the two-month battle led Reuther's successor as UAW president, Leonard Woodcock (1970-1977), to centralize still further the UAW's supplementary bargaining strategy. Since 1970 GM has not been challenged again in a head-on national struggle, and UAW policy there and at Chrysler - whose economic position was considered too weak to select for a lengthy national strike - became to exert national

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20. Company data.

leverage by a series of individual plant strikes.[21] The new international strategy of confronting the automakers locally rather than nationally meant, as the figures for Chrysler and GM show, the numbers of authorized strikes in the second half of the 1970s rose significantly above the level of the late 1950s and early 1960s:[22]

Annual average number of authorized strikes

	Chrysler	General Motors
1957-1967	1.8	7.7
1974-1979	5.5	19.2

Neither a sign of increased militancy on the part of the international, nor of increased combativity by the automakers, the greater involvement of the international in manifest conflict reflected the deterioration of what remained of local union autonomy within the UAW.

The autonomy of the UAW's locals had been written into the constitution in 1939 when the UAW's second president, Homer Martin, was in the process of trying to split the four-year-old

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21. In 1973, for example, the international informally encouraged action by seven Chrysler plants (including a half shift strike at Dodge Main instigated by president Andy Hardy) on the expiry of the 1970 contract. Woodcock, still in negotiations, then called an official strike but did not break off talks with management. This manoeuvre allowed him to release the pressure building up in the rank and file, while keeping tight control of the strike movement and giving himself time to finalize agreement with the corporation just one week later. Interview with Dick Clancy, Chrysler Corporation Labor Relations Executive and Personnel Manager at Hamtramck Assembly, 1969-1980, July 28 1982.

22. Company data.

union.[23] The regained autonomy came under threat during World War II when the IEB implemented the No Strike Pledge and took disciplinary action against certain local officers who defied it. Most accounts now endorse Cochran's view as to what happened after World War II: "Reuther's take-over spelled the end of the auto union's turbulent democracy; it triggered a rapid internal bureaucratization, and what had been a phenomenon of pluralism was snuffed out."[24] In 1949 Reuther got agreement from the convention for the IEB to institute disciplinary action against members when their own locals wouldn't, and he first attempted to introduce biennial international conventions. He got these in 1951. That year he tried to get biennial local union elections introduced but only won agreement for them to be held every two years if the local wished. He finally succeeded in getting two-yearly-elections made mandatory in 1957.[25] In 1950 he tightened his absolute hold over the IEB by closing access to and centralizing his own caucus: afterwards it only met in full during conventions. Between conventions any policy decisions needed were taken by a national steering committee of 200 local officers, while smaller regional steering committees picked the

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23. Bert Cochran, Labor and Communism: the Conflict that Shaped American Unions (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 143.

24. ibid, 279; John Anderson and Steve Jefferys, "The life story of a rank and file autoworker" (Unpublished MS: forthcoming, 1984), Chapter 7; Frank Marquart An Autoworkers' Journal (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 1975), 139: "...following Walter Reuther's complete victory in 1947, the UAW's democratic kind of factionalism was rapidly transformed into a one-party state."

25. Jack Stieber, Governing the UAW (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1962), 132, 35-6.

candidates the Reutherites would support.[26] The 1950s also saw a considerable expansion of the numbers of full-time international staff: while membership rose 21% between 1949 and 1960, the number of UAW staff based in Detroit and in the regions rose by 40% to 660. This represented a major consolidation of Reuther's power: dozens of them were former militant opponents who were now brought in line;[27] and their average age by 1961 was 49 years with an average service length of ten and a half years.[28] From the rapidly changing international staff of the 1930s and 1940s, Reuther had forged a permanent union bureaucracy that gave him total loyalty and was now too old to ever return to the plants. In the 1960s this apparatus effectively took over from the old Reuther caucus: he no longer needed a power base capable of acting outside the union machine once the old strongholds of opposition in the massive River Rouge and Dodge Main complexes had been brought to heel and as the union began to recruit significantly outside auto. As the union grew to over 1.5 million members, its size and the monolithic character of its international apparatus ensured that opposition could be restricted to isolated locals.

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26. Cochran, op cit, 325.

27. Harvey Swados, "The UAW - Over the top or over the hill?", Dissent, X, no. 4 (Autumn 1963), 330.

28. Stieber [1962], op cit, 92-4.

In the 1970s, the greater involvement of international reps in plant issues and politics not only reshaped the strike pattern, but it helped to influence collective bargaining in a way that prepared the ground for the later concessions and "non-adversarial" bargaining. While national contests of strength between the UAW and some of America's largest employers remained a regular occurrence, the UAW remained in certain ideological and organizational ways, a combative institution. National 'trials of strength' helped cover up the qualitative evolution of local bargaining away from questions such as track speeds, control of overtime and movement of labour. In the 1950s and 1960s local officers negotiated more widely with plant management on issues which constituted less and less any real challenge to managerial authority. But as long as there was a prospect the UAW would issue the automakers with a national challenge, then the international had to retain a confrontation capacity, and its local officers had to keep a certain distance from their managers. Industrial relations took the <u>form</u> of 'adversary bargaining' even if, customarily, they lacked any real bitterness.

In the late 1970s as adversary bargaining gradually gave way to what Ford's labour relations chief Ernie Savoie calls "appropriate mutualism",[29] national confrontations became less

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29. Letter to author from Ernie Savoie, Ford Labor Relations Director, October 23 1982.

likely and the role of local officers became less ambivalent. No longer required to adopt regular anti-managerial poses at the behest of the international, it was a natural progression for them to increasingly emphasize the mutual interests their own considerably-privileged positions as full-time officers meant they shared with management.

By the 1980s, the international UAW's central strategizing capacity had evolved to the point where all it could do was articulate an alternative business survival strategy (import controls to protect profits and jobs). The paradox of the UAW calling more authorized strikes as it both became more centralized and less independent of management was resolved as both authorized and unauthorized strikes seemingly withered away. Why and how this happened is one of several questions prompted by the Chrysler evidence; other issues are raised in the next section.

IV. Questions

Chrysler's strike history was clearly very different from the other major American automobile manufacturers. Chrysler had more large strikes between 1937 and 1958 than its rivals Ford and GM; unlike GM, Chrysler went through a major labour relations crisis from 1957 to 1959; and over forty years Chrysler's strike frequency averaged ten times GM's.[30] The three major national post-war contract clashes[31] between the UAW and GM meant GM's UAW-authorized loss rate was a little higher than Chrysler's: 34.8 hours per worker compared to 28.2 hours. But the major difference between Chrysler and GM was in the number and size of unauthorized strikes. For every hour a worker lost on unauthorized strike at GM, the Chrysler worker lost 8.2 hours. Only twice in 40 years was this strike loss ratio greater at GM than at Chrysler. While 29% of all lost manhours at Chrysler were incurred during unauthorized strikes, at GM the proportion was just four per cent.

This book suggests there is much that can be learned about the American working class, the labour process and managerial control by looking both at the changing pattern of conflict at

30. Unfortunately comparable data was not made available to me by Ford.

31. In 1945-46 and 1970, and in the wave of authorized local strikes in 1958.

the point of production and at the changing political world within which managers and managers exist and which also structures workplace legitimacy.[32] It focuses on what is seen as an exceptional company and an exceptional plant, Chrysler's Dodge Main, from the first trace of mass unionism in 1933 to the economic recession of 1979-82 when the plant was closed. The book demonstrates that a considerable degree of shop floor restraint over management and independent (from the international union machine of the United Automobile Workers) departmental problem-solving existed in Chrysler until the late 1950s, some time after they were lost in GM and Ford. It explains this early difference as a series of unintended outcomes that arose out the interaction of Chrysler management structure, labour relations strategy and market situation with an increasingly "rights" conscious labour force. The three years from 1957 to 1959 were a watershed in Chrysler labour relations, but aspects of the earlier tradition survived through to a conjuncture with the black movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. A second significant shift in the balance of forces between management and labour in Chrysler occurred in the mid-1970s, finally eliminating the earlier

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32. Approaching a similar analysis in his most recent essay, Burawoy abandons his earlier emphasis on the exclusive autonomy of the workplace in creating "consent" (see chapter 1 above) and argues against "theories of production that ignore its political moments". He suggests that "the process of production contains political and ideological elements as well as a purely economic moment". He now views the "factory regime" as a "political apparatus" that regulates struggles over "the politics of production". Interestingly, from the standpoint of this author, Burawoy's apparent change of heart has come about in the process of trying to reconcile his Chicago piecework shop with one in Manchester; [1983] op cit, 587.

combative tradition and preparing the way for Chrysler workers' precedent-setting acceptance of concessions between 1979 and 1981.

Can Chrysler be simply dismissed as an exception? Or was it the tip of an ice-berg of post-war shop floor struggle that has remained hidden from history? By suggesting that the terms of workplace control were still in contention throughout the last fifty years at Chrysler the account challenges the insistence on a rigid tripartite periodization of recent American working class history into the 'militant' 1930s, a passive continuity from World War Two to the late 1960s, and a new "militancy" in the late 1960s and 1970s.[33] The Chrysler evidence suggests fewer divergences between the American and British workplace experience than have usually been assumed.[34] This would support the conclusion that the American working class is not internationally peculiar and would help explain why workers' responses to the late 1970s recession has been remarkably similar in both countries. This book will have done its task if it helps persuade others to continue with the search to uncover the true

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33. This is the "decay of homogenization", followed by the "segmentation of labor" followed in turn by the "decay of segmentation" presented in Gordon et al, op cit, 12-16.

34. In an analysis that could have accurately described many of the problems faced by Chrysler management, Thurley and Wood pose the problem large British firms have in developing a strategic approach to industrial relations: "Most problems arise from the unanticipated consequences of organizational structures and reward systems developed to solve specific tasks and problems or to meet 'informal' political pressures"; Thurley and Wood, op cit, 223.

contours of American working class resistance - as it happened and is happening, and not to write it off if it didn't occur according to the researcher's tastes.

The evidence of Chrysler's 'exceptionalism' forces four key questions. Why did such a high level of observable conflict at Chrysler occur outside the official UAW channels before 1959? Why did the years 1957-59 constitute so dramatic a turning point? What was the significance of the strike upturn of 1967-77? And the question we turn to first in Part Two: why did shop floor labour relations develop differently in the major automobile manufacturers?

PART TWO

AUTOCRACY AND RESISTANCE

1928–1941

CHAPTER 3

PASSING ADVERSITY

LABOR AND POLITICS IN THE 1930s

The years from the election of President Hoover in 1928 to the entry of the United States into World War II in 1941 were momentous. 'Prosperity' turned to depression;[1] federal government intervened in social and economic planning; and the structure of today's automobile industry was formed. But possibly the most enduring change was that which took place in the relationship between management and workers.

I. Overview

The change in labour relations is seen starkly in the figures of trade union density. For, whatever other implications union membership had subsequently, in the 1930s it meant opposition to arbitrary dictates of management; and successful unionism, a growth in members, meant workers actively placing restraints on

1. Irving Bernstein, The Lean Years: a history of the American worker, 1920-1933 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), 47-82, demonstrates that the benefits of the undoubted economic growth of the 1920s largely missed American workers.

managerial autonomy. The number of union members fell from 3.27 million in 1928 to 2.81 million in 1933 before rising to 3.93 million in 1936, and then more than doubled to 8.41 million in 1941. As a percentage of the potential non-agricultural workforce, union density was 9.6% in 1928, 7.3% in 1933, 9.8% in 1936 and 19.5% in 1941.[2] Only once before, in 1920 and 1921, had it even approached the one in five mark. But this time, there was no going back: union density has remained above 20% ever since. This explosion in union membership differed from previous upsurges by permanently marking American labour relations.

Strike frequency statistics are also revealing. For although strikes per million non-agricultural workers were generally much more common before 1922, the velocity with which strike frequency increased in the 1930s has not been matched since. From an historical low of 24.7 strikes per million workers over the three years 1927-29, to around 96, nearly four times as high, between 1934 and 1941.[3] For labour relations this was indeed a period of high drama.

Throughout the 1920s growing numbers of city workers (and coal miners) had been switching from the traditional urban party,

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2. George Bain and Robert Price, Profiles of Union Growth: A comparative statistical portrait of eight countries (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), 88. Union membership quoted here are those calculated by the National Bureau of Economic Research.

3. Edwards P K, op cit, 254.

the Republicans, to the Democrats. In 1920 the Democrats cornered just 30.5% of the New York vote, but in 1928 they won 62.1%; and in Detroit over the same years their share of the vote also doubled: from 19% to 37.1%.[4] This twin trend to city-living and Democrat-voting reflected many factors: the slowing down of immigration, the dawning of political maturity for the second generation of 'new' pre-1914 immigrants; the migration of nearly 20 million people from rural to urban areas in the 1920s; the severe income inequality that left most wage earners' families living below "the American standard" in the mid-1920s; and the defeat of the old, rural, Protestant, southern and western, power base within the Democratic Party by its urban, 'new' immigrant, Catholic, Jewish and eastern elements.[5]

The political trend hinted at in 1928 became a landslide in 1932. The new president, Roosevelt, polled 22.8 million votes to Hoover's 15.8 million. Urban workers and coal miners voted overwhelmingly for him and against unemployment, pay and job insecurity and Hoover's inactivity. In New York Roosevelt took 73.4% of the vote, and in Detroit 59.4%. Michigan's eight large cities all went Democratic, as did even the traditionally Republican black vote. Roosevelt took every major metropolitan

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4. Bernstein (1960), op cit, 77-80.

5. ibid, 47-50, 63-5, 76-7; Samuel Lubell, "Revolt of the City", Electoral change and stability in American Political History, eds. Jerome M Clubb and Howard W Allen (New York: the Free Press, 1971), 9-16.

centre in the Midwest, the West and the South. American workers, without any direction from the American Federation of Labor, had reconstructed the pattern of American politics.[6]

Roosevelt's 1933 New Deal administration was a balance of rich, established Republicans with rich, recently-established Democrats.[7] Almost in spite of itself, it nonetheless played a major part in the process of change that its own election had indicated was already underway.[8] On June 16 1933 Roosevelt signed the National Industrial Recovery Act, a measure crucial in legitimizing union activity. The previously stagnating American Federation of Labor instantly launched an appeal to unorganized workers and called on its affiliated bodies to launch intensive organizing drives.[9] But the progress of unionism was far from straightforward. It had to overcome not only the intensely sectional, craft character of the AFL and the unremitting hostility of the employers, but the equivocation of Roosevelt himself. And the onset of depression in 1929 had presented another

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6. ibid, 508-11.

7. Arthur Marwick, Class: image and reality in Britain, France and the USA since 1930, (Glasgow: Fontana, 1981), 191-2.

8. Irving Bernstein, Turbulent Years: a history of the American worker, 1933-1941 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), 35, argues that in supporting the National Industrial Recovery Act's famous clause 7(a), Roosevelt and his administration "committed themselves, doubtless without realizing it, to a broad policy of government intervention in collective bargaining that was to lead far beyond 7(a)".

9. ibid; Charles P Larrowe, Harry Bridges: the rise and fall of raidcal labor in the US (New York: Lawrence Hill, 1972), 15.

uniquely American problem: underemployment of the large numbers of gangsters created by the 1920s' combination of prosperity and Prohibition led organized crime in many major cities to deliberately infiltrate local and international unions whose semi-casual job markets and small employer industrial structures were ideal for job protection rackets. Physical intimidation and corruption became a way of life in many unions.[10]

The size, growth and diversity of American industry in the 1920s had combined with the survival of predominantly craft-based unions to establish a wage structure with exceptionally high (by international standards) differentials. Regional differentials of up to 90% were compounded by the common practice in much of manufacturing of paying skilled workers 100% more than unskilled workers, a division often marked along racial and ethnic lines. These differentials could also be traced between unionized and non-unionized industrial sectors.[11] Union membership for many, if not all, of its nearly all-white, all-male members in the late 1920s, meant not so much an access to craft control on the job but to privileges denied to others. The AFL reflected this. Its affiliated unions wanted union growth without any reduction of differentials, which they believed certain if skilled workers in

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10. Bernstein [1960], op cit, 338-41.

11. ibid, 66-70.

the unorganized industries were encourged to join industrial unions with semi- and unskilled workers. This ambivalence sabotaged the AFL's drive to unionize the auto workers in 1933, and weakened the rubber workers in 1934, the year that saw sharp clashes between strikers and the police in Toledo, and general strikes in Minneapolis and San Francisco.[12] Public figures, such as Walter Lippmann and Father Charles Coughlin, were among the many who attacked the AFL for refusing to empower its new Federal Local Unions to form inclusive international unions.[13] Within the AFL, John L Lewis, the president of the biggest existing industrial union, the United Mine Workers, having agreed a compromise resolution at the 1934 AFL Convention that changed nothing, moved into open hostility in 1935.

In August 1935 the AFL called all Federal Local Unions in auto to send delegates to a meeting in Detroit. There, AFL president William Green issued them with a charter as the United Automobile Workers of America but announced they would not be allowed jurisdiction over skilled workers. When he failed to get the Convention to elect his choice for president, pattern maker Francis Dillon, Green simply appointed him to the job.[14] At the

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12. Bernstein (1969), 218-98.

13. ibid, 363.

14. Preis, op cit, 39-40.

October 1935 AFL Convention both the general case for industrial unionism and the United Auto Workers' appeal for approval of a broad industrial jurisdiction were defeated. But with 38% of the voting delegates supporting him, Lewis decided there was a large enough core to press ahead anyway. He immediately organized a meeting of eight union presidents who had supported industrial unionism at the AFL convention, and they set up the Committee for Industrial Organization in November 1935.[15]

The formation of the CIO triggered the great formalization of union membership from 1936 to 1941. It broke the craft mold of the AFL unions and created an organizational framework for mass production industry unionism. Craft control and job monopoly could be defended by a union structure external to the plant. But semi-skilled restraints over managerial autonomy could only be maintained plant-by-plant by a mass membership. And that required drawing all workers into the same organizational framework, not drawing lines between them. The CIO, formed from above, offered a structure that met the needs of the spontaneous activity among rank-and-file workers. And it brought with it a key role for the professional organizer and for centralized policy-making and administration.

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15. Bernstein [1969], op cit, 386-400. The UAW's appeal was lost by 125 votes to 104.

The CIO was crucial; managements continued vigorously to oppose all forms of unionism, and the New Deal legislation was clearly not unionizing workers on its own. The response of most major employers to the 1933 NRA had been to launch their own company unions. The National Association of Manufacturers had taken the lead in August 1933 by distributing a notice to employees telling them it was not the intention of the NRA that "employees should pay money into any organization". The National Metal Trades Assocation, whose Detroit branch secretary was also general manager of the influential Detroit Employers' Association and whose members included GM and Chrysler, declared: "The United States is an Open Shop Nation."[16] Roosevelt endorsed this in March 1934 when he intervened to prevent a threatened strike and imposed a settlement on the auto workers that "favors no particular union or particular form of employee organization or representation".[17] In May 1935, the Supreme Court declared the NRA unconstitutional. The employers' cheers had barely died down before Roosevelt signed the National Labor Relations Act in July. This 'Wagner Act', named after its principal architect, established a National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) with powers to rule against employers' denial of workers' rights to organise and enter collective bargaining. Violently denounced at first as an interference with the rights of management, the NLRB would

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16. ibid, 38-39; William McPherson, Labor Relations in the Automobile Industry (Washington DC: Brookings Institute, 1940), 13-14; Sugar, op cit, 117.

17. Bernstein (1969), op cit, 184-5.

later accustom managements to the benefits of impartial arbitrators. In two important ways the Wagner Act laid down procedures which would work in the long term to encourage industrial rather than craft unionism. It ruled that the union supported by a majority of workers in a unit would be the "exclusive" legal body for "all the employees in such unit for the purposes of collective bargaining". And it gave the Board the power to determine the size of the unit. In a third clause it obliquely served to give some legal basis for section shop stewards: to protect (non-union) minority rights it declared that "any individual or group of employees shall have the right at any time to present grievances to their employer through representatives of their own choosing" - a clause that would be repeated later in the major union contracts between GM, Ford and Chrysler and the UAW. At first the Board did not count for much. Not until April 1937 was it declared constitutional and its effective role in regulating labour relations in the automobile industry really began only in 1939.[18]

More significant at the time was the formation of the CIO. The formal suspension of the ten CIO unions by the AFL took place in September 1936. But the CIO had already launched two key organizing drives: in the steel industry it aimed to take over the

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18. ibid, 328-349, 515.

industry's works council-company unions from within;[19] and in auto it sought to unite the four small existing unions. In December 1935 Adolph Germer went to Detroit for the CIO to try to bring the UAW, Father Coughlin's Automotive Industrial Workers' Association (AIWA),[20] Matt Smith's Mechanics Educational Society of America (MESA) and Arthur Greer's Hudson-based Associated Automobile Workers of America together. Several attempts failed before Dillon stood down as UAW president at the 1936 convention in South Bend and the election of Homer Martin signified a victory for local autonomy over the dictates of the AFL. This was followed rapidly by the merger into the UAW of the AIWA and of three left-wing Detroit MESA locals, and in July by the affiliation of the UAW to the CIO and its subsequent suspension from the AFL.[21]

In November 1936 the CIO vigorously campaigned for Roosevelt and the United Mine Workers' $500,000 campaign contribution made it the biggest single contributor to Democratic Party funds. The

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19. ibid, 457, cites a CIO supporter's argument from the Chicago-Gary steel mills area in January 1936: "It seems clear that where company unions are established, one of the best ways to fight them is to elect real honest union men as representatives..." This strategy of taking over the employee representative scheme and turning in into a genuine union is pretty much the pattern followed at Dodge Main between 1933 and 1936.

20. Father Charles E Coughlin, the 'radio priest' whose Sunday night sermons were broadcast nationwide from the urban Midwest over 26 radio stations, and whose Radio League of the Little Flower had contributed $5,000 to the 1932 Bonus Expeditonary Force's key political demonstration against Hoover; Alan Brinkley, Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1982), 44-5, 107-8; Bernstein (1960), op cit, 445.

21. ibid, 504-9.

Roosevelt labour bandwagon pulled a massive 61% of a popular vote that was also rejecting the Liberty League Republican candidate, Alfred M Landon.[22] The election result was both a confirmation from millions of American workers that they could successfully challenge the will of the world's biggest employers, and a legitimation of that challenge.[23] Many employers either recognised this new consciousness voluntarily or were soon forced to do so. In three successive months General Motors, US Steel and Chrysler signed their first contracts with CIO unions, whose new-found legitimacy then gave rise to an immense mushrooming of members.[24] The UAW signed with General Motors and Chrysler in February and April 1937.

These agreements followed sit-in strikes that, as exemplars of a 'golden age' of American class struggle, have obscured three important qualifications. First, they were won by the active and short-term participation of a small minority.[25] At Chrysler's biggest plant, Dodge Main, where participation was greater than elsewhere, Gertrude Nalezty's experience was common. A second shift worker, she reported for work on March 8 when the sit-down

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22. ibid, 449.

23. Sidney Fine, Sit-down: the GM Strike of 1936-1937 (Ann Arbor, Michigan: 1969), 96.

24. Nelson Lichtenstein, Labor's War at Home: The CIO in World War II (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 12.

25. David Montgomery, "Spontaneity and Organization: Some Comments", Radical Ameria 7, no. 6 (Nov-Dec 1973), 73.

began and was denied admittance by the plant guards. Her participation was limited to passing her lunch box over the fence to the workers inside. After that she sat at home until the company called her back.[26] The speed of unionization and the resulting lack of mass involvement would have important consequences for workplace unionism, encouraging bureaucratic tendencies in the UAW. The upsurge was formalised by a quite small handful of leaders. The union's origins implanted both a strong tradition of local autonomy[27] and the roots of the 'popular bossdom' that set in from 1947.[28]

Second, this minority involvement in unionization among mass production workers was reflected in the mobilization of opinion in society at large. Thus the Supreme Court was confident enough by April 1937 to rule that sit-down strikes were illegal - an decision that contributed to the virtual disappearance of the tactic. Another reflection of unionism's minority support was the

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26. Interview by author with Gertrude Nalezty, Detroit, August 10 1982.

27. Fine, op cit, 94.

28. Hyman (1975), op cit, 71-2, referring to the 'New Union' explosion in Britain in the late 1880s and early 1890s, argues in terms that could equally well apply to the CIO unions of the late 1930s: "While spontaneous activity and militancy among rank-and-file workers was an essential part of the explosion of 'new unionism', the formalisation of this upsurge was carried through largely from above; and the machinery of government was shaped from above by the original leaders...Sectional strains and pressures...constituted an ever-present threat to the integrity of the union (and indeed, breakaway movements were not uncommon); and the most obvious solution (at least as it appeared to the leaders themselves) was strong leadership control and only limited scope for rank-and-file autonomy. The government of such unions has been given the colourful label 'popular bossdom' (by H A Turner, Trade Union Growth, Structure and Policy, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1962), 291)."

CIO's defeat in its unionizing drive in the five steel companies known as Little Steel in the summer of 1937.[29] But most revealing of the failure of the radical impetus of the sit-down strikes to generalize outwards and influence the four out of every five workers who remained non-union throughout the 1930s, were the 1938 congressional election results. These showed a marked shift to the Republicans: the mobilization of an anti-radical backlash had begun. The days of the New Deal were drawing to a close.

Third, the unionizing process was far from homogeneous: a tradition of departmental and sectional collective organization had already taken a firmer hold at Chrysler than at GM. While the two firms introduced similar company union strategies in 1933, they had applied them differently. Sections of the Chrysler workforce exploited the openings their management created with consequences not possible in GM plants, and established significantly higher levels of restraint over managerial authority. GM used the 1937-1939 auto recession to eliminate many potential restraints from formal agreements, but Chrysler was less effective. In both, the principal restraint was an obligation on management to abide by a union-policed seniority list for lay-offs and recalls. A UAW Local 3 organizing leaflet distributed in Dodge Main early in 1940 warned:

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29. Preis, op cit, 62-73.

> If you don't have the union steward looking after your interests, you might be overlooked when your turn arrives on the seniority list. A single week lost this way means a week's wages. THAT MEANS THREE TIMES AS MUCH AS YOU WOULD HAVE TO PAY IN DUES FOR AN ENTIRE YEAR.30

But the differences between GM and Chrysler were already present: in Chrysler plants, sectional stewards were already playing the key role of supervising seniority lists, while at GM stewards played no recognized role at all. And, in Dodge Main, workers had also erected some restraints over management's unilateral control of the pace of work. These restraints and their organizational base grew stronger with the upturn of the American economy in 1939-41 as the European war stimulated order books. By then they had become a part of workplace legitimacy.[31] In certain plants and industries this tradition survived for nearly 20 years. This survival was despite the Stalin-Hitler Pact of 1939 that opened the flood-gates of anti-Communism inside the CIO and allowed the Roosevelt administration to attack the Communist Party for fermenting strikes in war industries in 1940 and 1941.[32] It was despite the United States entry into World War II after Pearl Harbor in December 1941; and despite the CIO becoming a central wartime supporter of the 'No Strike Pledge'. The survival of the

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30. Leaflet entitled "Something to think about" (n.d.) in John Zaremba collection, Box 9, Wayne State University Walter Reuther Library.

31. It is wrong to assume that 'formalization' of shop floor labour relations through the acceptance of collective bargaining and the recognition of plant committees necessarily leads to bureaucratization and less conflict. In Britain in the late 1960s and early 1970s one study found a causal connection between formalization of relations and the establishment of full-time shop stewards and the incidence of strikes; H A Turner, Geoffrey Roberts and David Roberts, Management Characteristics and Labour Conflict: A study of managerial organization, attitudes and industrial relations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 39.

32. Lichtenstein [1982], op cit, 57-65.

autonomous union tradition in Chrysler plants testifies to an often-ignored range of possible labour relations developments still open to American labour during and after World War II.

II. Issues

The account below of the origins of unionism at Dodge Main questions the argument that early UAW militants were located in technologically similar areas of auto plants and that unionization itself was a genuinely mass experience. These issues are taken up here to help develop a major theme of this book: that workplace consciousness is determined by the interplay of internal labour relations with the wider external political economy. Neither structural nor economic determinism provides satisfactory explanatory frameworks for changes in the relationships of management to managed; nor does wishful thinking.

Nelson Lichtenstein has argued that the location of the "structure of work in the auto industry largely determined the character of worker militancy in the factories".[33] He makes two related but different assertions. First, that "collective resistance to managerial authority centered in most plants" among

33. Nelson Lichtenstein, "Auto Worker Militancy and the Structure of Factory Life, 1937-1955", Journal of American History, September 1980, 335-353.

the "higher skilled workers engaged in sub-assembly and in 'bench work'", and second:

> The greatest militancy in most factories came not among the alienated and atomized workers of the main assembly line, but among those employees who maintained a high degree of verbal interaction and group identification and who retained a distinctive level of skill or collective experience.34

The evidence from Dodge Main, however, does not support the generalization that parts and sub-assembly workers were more militant than others. "The greatest militancy" will of course be shown by sections of workers who develop a collective spirit through talking, sharing the same work, the same grievances etc. But it is not immediately obvious why the chances to develop this collectivity should not occur to sections of workers on assembly lines. At Dodge Main the largest numbers of workers were concentrated on the crowded conveyor lines in the body-in-white and trim departments. Not surprisingly, Chrysler's works council plan, its successor, the independent Coughlinite union and afterwards the UAW itself, were all dominated by individuals based in these key areas.[35] And, unlike the wire room where women working on the benches were not allowed to talk while they worked, foremen could not prevent "verbal interaction" in the din of the body shop or the crowded trim shop.

It is not even clear that the sub-assembly and bench

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34. Lichtenstein (1980), op cit, 336-7.

35. Friedlander, op cit, 127.

workers were more highly skilled than those on the assembly lines. The 1924 breakdown of auto workers' occupations by Charles Reitell suggests that the 10-15% of "assemblers" had as great or as little skill as the largest group of auto workers, the 25-40% who were "machine tenders".[36] Both Henry Ford's own argument in 1922 that 43% of his workers needed only one day's training while a further 36% could be trained in less than a week, and the 1928 Chrysler estimate that 75% of its workers could pick up their jobs in one or two days, confirm this point.[37] The overwhelming majority of non-assembly line workers had as much or as little 'skill' as assembly line workers. The argument does not even hold for those "higher skilled" workers. Metal finishers, for example, were "higher skilled" workers, but not 'skilled' in the sense of having served an apprenticeship. They might work on 'benches' doing rectification or on the main body building conveyor line. Sometimes these workers were "militant", as in the 1933 Briggs strike and sometimes they were not.[38] Their militancy was not determined structurally but politically.

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36. Cited in Robert W Dunn, Labor and Automobiles (New York: International Publishers, 1929), 61.

37. Quoted in Dunn, op cit, 61.

38. See below, Chapter 5, for the 1933 Briggs strike and John Anderson's analysis of the union activists at the GM Fleetwood Fisher Body plant in December 1936; John W Anderson and Steve Jefferys, A Life of Struggle: the story of a rank and file autoworker (Forthcoming: typescript 275 pages, 1984), Chapter 4.

This study of the unionization of Dodge Main finds two groups of workers played a leading role: the first was made up of those like Richard Frankensteen (in the trim department) and John Zaremba (first a clerical worker then an operator in the heat treatment),[39] who had high school and college educations but who had been unable to find white collar work because of the Great Depression.[40] This group included other men in semi or unskilled jobs like Leon Pody, a former businessman ruined by the Depression, and Richard Harris, formerly an insurance salesman, and Harry Ross, whose father had wanted him to go to college. There were also Hamtramck Poles such as Walter Rogowski, a former mechanic,[41] and Joe Ptasynski, a former tool and die maker. The second group was made up of immigrants from continental Europe or the British Isles, like the Probe brothers and Pat Quinn in the Dodge trim department or the skilled Bill Mckie at Ford, who brought with them expectations of some form of union organization. Of course, many others from different backgrounds played a part in the unionizing process; but these two groups

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39. Or like Walter Reuther who attended university part-time and John W Anderson who was a full-time student under J R Commons in Wisconsin; see Anderson and Jefferys, op cit, Chapter 3.

40. This complements Ronald Schatz's findings, "Union pioneers: the Founders of Local Unions at General Electric and Westinghouse, 1933-1937", Journal of American History, no. 66 (1979), 586-602, that male union organizers "were members of an elite stratum of the industry's work force", but expands on the definition of "elite" to include social origins and educational backgrounds.

41. Friedlander, op cit, 121-2.

provided disproportionately more organizers. They were young and had had less than five years' employment in the industry when they first began to organize. They also shared a greater responsiveness to the political indignities management was forcing people with their backgrounds to accept, and a closer acquaintance with needed organizational skills, than their fellow workers. Neither factor was the monopoly of any strategic group of 1930s auto workers. The incentive to collective organization was provided by the economic and work constraints of mass production; but the impetus came primarily as a political development triggered by the presence in the work force of a significant number of individuals who were especially 'rights conscious'.

This raises a second issue. Though David Brody has called for research on the extent of rank and file activism,[42] radical historians usually exaggerate it. Daniel Guerin wrote of "the epidemic of factory occupations" with "nearly 200,000 workers...involved" in March 1937.[43] Art Preis found even more - "a couple of million in the 1936-37 sit-down wave".[44] David Gordon et al come down in between; they cite uncritically (from Irving

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42. David Brody, Workers in Industrial America, (New York: Oxford University, 1980), 134.

43. Daniel Guerin, 100 years of Labor in the USA, (London, Ink Links, 1979) 113.

44. Art Preis, Labor's Giant Step (New York, Pathfinder, 1972), 63.

Bernstein [45] the Bureau of Labor Statistics data suggesting "nearly 400,000 workers participated in sit-down strikes at their peak in 1936-37". [46] This figure is also quoted by Jeremy Brecher, who shows how the sitdown "was used to challenge management decisions" and "to combat a wide range of social grievances", and whose analysis of the significance of the sitdown concludes:

> Workers had used the sitdown to establish a direct counter-power to management - freedom to set the pace of work, to tell the foreman where to get off, to share the work equitably, to determine their share of the product, and the like.47

If nearly half a million American workers truly had been actively and consciously involved in doing all these things the subsequent history of the American working class might have been very different. Unfortunately, things weren't quite like that. The 'golden age of militancy' is a myth.

The sit-down movement was very important. The increasingly vocal wish of managements in the 1980s to rid themselves of many of the limited obligations that are the pale legacy of the mass unionism of the 1930s is testimony to that. But it is important not to exaggerate the movement. To do so distorts reality -

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45. Bernstein, op cit, 500.

46. Gordon et al, op cit, 177,

47. Jeremy Brecher, Strike!, (Greenwich, Ct: Fawcett Premier, 1974), 260-1, 265.

which other sources present much more accurately - and makes it impossible to grasp the overall development of American labour through the 1930s into the 1940s and 1950s. If all those laid off as a result of a minority of workers taking over one or more conveyor lines inside the plant are counted as "participating", the essentially defensive character of the sit-down tactic is turned on its head. It was used because the activists were too few to risk putting up pickets to keep the majority of workers out. As the Dodge Main strike bulletin put it on March 11 1937:

> If they (the workers) went outside, some scab might come in and take their jobs. That is why we are staying in: to protect our jobs.

At Flint the sitdown was used by a minority to stop the movement of dies out of the plant. And it depended less for its success on strength and solidarity at the point of production than on the non-intervention of the state (police or national guardsmen) and on political support in the local community.

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48. More realistic estimates of UAW membership and levels of actual participation in the auto industry sit-down movement are available: Bert Cochran, Labor and Communism: the struggle that shaped American labor (Princeton: University Press, 1977), 114, suggests there were only 200 UAW members out of the 4,500 workforce at Kelsey-Hayes before the December 1936 sit-down there; he estimates the climb in UAW membership in Flint as going from 150 in October 1936 to 4,500 in December out of a total GM workforce in the city of 47,000, 118. Sidney Fine, op cit, reports 208 Cadillac sit-downers, 49 Fleetwood Fisher Body sit-downers and 96 Guide Lamp sit-downers, 251. These were plants where management kept control of the gates and so workers who left the sit-down could not return or be replaced. In fact, the Fleetwood figure Fine uses was the number who originally voted to sit-down, and the number who actually stayed in was less than that; Anderson and Jefferys, op cit, Chapter 6. Fine, ibid, 142-144, suggests only about 10% of the Cleveland Fisher Body workforce of 7,200 were UAW members when its sit-down began in December 1936, and GM testified that only 259 workers actually disobeyed its order to leave the plant; he also reports the Flint Fisher Body No.2 sit-down beginning with "not more than 50 workers on the body line". Fine, 168, cites the recollections of sit-downers on numbers in the No 1 plant varying from over "one thousand on some days...to a low of 90 on one occasion"; and the Michigan National Guard report listing 450 in the No 2 plant on January 5 falling to 17 on January 26 1937.

Guerin, writing in 1968 from a neo-Trotskyist perspective, came close to idealizing the sit-down movement:

> The upsurge was a closely-knit combination of spontaneity and planning; the elemental thrust of the masses complemented perfectly the experienced leadership of a minority of trade union organizers. The movement was at one and the same time centralized and democratic.49

But this analysis makes it impossible to explain the subsequent history of the UAW and the development of industrial relations other than in terms of a crude "sell-out". The absence in 1937 of general solidarity strikes such as there had been in Minneapolis and San Francisco in 1934; the defensive sit-down tactic; the intimidatory violence used against scabs; the huge 86% of potential union members who still did not join up in 1937; the less than a million votes for the Socialist and Communist presidential candidates in 1936; the weekly radio audience of millions that listened to the anti-Semitic, anti-Communist sermons of Father Coughlin. Realities that don't fit simply into the idea of an "elemental thrust" are simply ignored.

For Brecher, writing in 1972, there is both a forward move and its opposite: the CIO appeared "as the champion of the great sitdown wave" while at the same time "it was systematically opposing and crushing sitdown movements".[50] The contradiction in his argument, between the scale and depth of worker militancy and class consciousness and the apparent ability of a few hundred

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49. Guerin, op cit, 111.

50. Brecher, op cit, 265-6.

individuals who had risen to the top of brand new workers' organizations to "oppose and crush" this great upsurge, is not investigated. And so Brecher fails fully to explicate workers' "powerlessness" that is properly the starting point of his book.

Yet tactical and numerical weaknesses at the moment of auto unionism's greatest advance were reflected in the essentially defensive character of the movement's principal demands: for an end to piecework and for a "fair" rather than arbitrary selection of those who should get laid off. As GM had partially grasped by 1940, these demands did not challenge any crucial part of management power. They altered the form of control, but not its content. The sit-downers sought and achieved restraints on managerial authority; they altered the limits of workplace legitimacy but they did not change the law. As David Brody has argued, "The sit-down strikers perceived of themselves as fighting for legal rights already theirs; the company stood outside the law, not they."[51] The narrowness of the sit-down movement's active base, its limited aims and the recession of 1937-1938 meant its immediate impact on management's rights to lay off workers or to determine job classifications and rates was slight. But the GM and Chrysler contracts gave management's blessing to union organization in auto. This new double-edged contribution to mass unionism was largely responsible for transforming the minority

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51. Brody, op cit, 142.

into an overwhelming majority. "Powerlessness" for organized workers became a distant memory; but the "power" that was gained was only partial and remained conditional on managerial approval.

III. Structure

Chapter 4 examines the emergence of Chrysler as a major auto manufacturer, the working conditions of auto workers in the early 1930s and the widespread worker resistance that developed in 1933 to which management responded with a company union. Chapter 5 traces the emergence of an 'independent' union at Dodge Main in the mid-1930s. Chapter 6 considers the circumstances that led to the 1937 sit-down strike and the significance of the first UAW-Chrysler contract and the 1937-1939 faction fight within the UAW. Finally, Chapter 7 looks at the workers' victory in the 1939 strike and at the consolidation of the view that workers' restraints on arbitrary management were 'legitimate rights'.

CHAPTER 4

MANAGERIAL CONTROL IN THE EARLY 1930s

The Great Depression of 1929-1933 underlined the extent of managerial control that had existed in the 1920s over semi- and unskilled workers, and brought this home to most skilled workers too. The South Carolina mill owner who declared, "We govern like the Czar of Russia,"[1] was not an exception. Management absolutism, though never uniform, ensured that workers' lives were dominated by an insecurity which the recession compounded. But even in an industry as hard-hit as auto, the Great Depression did not have a homogeneous effect. Section one of Chapter 4 shows how Chrysler strengthened its market position from 1929 to 1933, while maintaining unilateral control over its workers. Section two traces the twin impact on workers and management of the start of economic recovery and the inauguration of the New Deal administration in 1933.

1. Bernstein (1960), op cit, 7.

I. Management

On May 29 1928 the 53-year-old Walter P Chrysler bought the ailing Dodge Brothers Company and with it, Dodge Main, the 30-acre plant in Hamtramck, a city-suburb of Detroit. Here, some 30,000 workers were soon turning out about a quarter of a million cars a year, including the new Plymouth and DeSoto models as well as the existing Dodge. With two other plants at Highland Park and Jefferson Avenue, Chrysler overnight became America's third largest automaker.[2]

Compared with Ford and the largely local managements of several of the more expensive car-making firms in Detroit, Chrysler Corporation, like General Motors, had an out-of-town, professional management image from the start.[3] Chrysler himself came from Kansas, and had risen from apprentice mechanic to GM Buick president. K T Keller, who headed the management team that dramatically re-organized Dodge Main in 1928, had been an apprentice machinist in Pennsylvania and, subsequently, general

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2. Charles K Hyde, History of the Dodge Brothers Motor Car Company Plant 1910-1980 (Detroit: Unpublished, Wayne State University, 1981), 17.

3. Donald F Davies, "The Price of Conspicuous Production: the DetroitElite and the Automobile Industry, 1900-1933", Journal of Social History, (Fall 1982), 24.

manager of GM's Canadian operations. But this GM background did not mean Chrysler adopted the multi-divisional decentralized organizational structure that characterized GM after 1925. Chrysler had left GM in 1920, Keller in 1926. Formed in 1925, the Chrysler Corporation kept its centralized, unitary form of management structure until the second half of the 1950s.

In the early 1930s Walter Chrysler exercised the power of an autocrat.[5] He was also near the end of his working career, turning over the presidency to Keller, who was ten years his junior, in July 1935. Industrial relations policy under Walter Chrysler had been a mixture of antiunionism and not especially generous paternalism.[6] A 'Good Cheer Fund' had provided workers with company picnics and a legal advice bureau. When Chrysler took over Dodge, he inherited its marginally better provisions: a group life insurance package, free dances for employees, a welfare department that might give a worker a small loan, and legal advice

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4. R. Stuart, Bailout (South Bend, Indiana: And Books, 1980), 39-51.

5. Top executives used to leave their work to meet him at the Detroit train station on his return from frequent business trips to New York City as they fought over the succession; Stuart, op cit, 50; Howell John Harris, The Right to Manage: industrial relations policies of American Business in the 1940s (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1982), 27, cites Clarence J Hicks, My Life in Industrial Relations: fifty years in the growth of a profession (New York: Harper, 1941), 111: "In no area... is the character and personality of the controlling executive or group more clearly reflected than in policies dealing with labour relations."

6. Nicholas Abercrombie and Stephen Hill's observation that paternalism as "a collective form of social organisation" was one in which "paternalistic employers often use the language of personal obligation...in order to convey the moral duties of employers and employees to each other" applies powerfully to Chrysler in the early 1930s; "Paternalism and Patronage", British Journal of Sociology, 27, no. 4 (Dec 1976), 414-8.

for workers.[7]

Expansion in Depression

Market conditions in the late 1920s proved ideal for Chrysler. With demand for cars jumping by 56% from 1927 to 1929, the Dodge purchase enabled Chrysler to more than double its output and to finance itself. Chrysler Corporation's first annual average pre-tax return for 1925-29 was 11.2% - enough, as Table 4 shows, to survive the recession and to continue to increase its market share:

TABLE 4
CHRYSLER PRODUCTION[a], MARKET SHARE AND PROFITABILITY[b], 1925-1945

Five yearly average	Passenger car production (000s)	Car market share (%)	Return on sales (car and non-car) (%)
1925-29	316	10.03	11.16
1930-34	292	15.51	.34
1935-39	724	23.14	8.36
1940-41	907	24.24	7.95
1942-45			6.13

SOURCE: Chrysler Corporation, Financial and General Fact Book, June 1973; Wards Automotive Year Book, 1969, 79.
NOTE: a. Based on new passenger car registrations from 1925-34.
b. Before tax operating margin as a percentage of net sales.

In 1933, the first year of recovery, Chrysler built nearly the

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7. Dunn, op cit, 153.

same number of cars as it had in 1929 when its market share was 8.2%, but its share of sales had risen to 25.4%. The rapid boom of 1927-29 followed by the deep recession of 1930-32 effectively eliminated much of the competition. The number of establishments in the motor vehicle industry fell from 210 to 122 between 1929 and 1933.[8] The survivors, GM, Ford and Chrysler, claimed the spoils: their combined market share rose from 59% in 1927 to 87.5% five years later.[9]

Managerial control

While Chrysler was expanding its market share, its workers faced virtually unlimited managerial control. Control has two aspects: the power to lay down terms of subordination - the wage rates, hours of work and working conditions; and the authority to force workers to accept and carry out the methods and pace of work determined by management. During the three successive years of collapse of the American car market after 1929, the exercise by workers of restraints over either aspect of managerial control became extremely difficult. Restraint of output continued, as Mathewson's notable study demonstrated. He found that foremen often played an organizing role in holding up work so that lay-offs would be postponed:

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8. Sidney Fine, The Automobile under the Blue Eagle, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1963), 18.

9. See Table 1 in A D Chandler, Giant Enterprise (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964), 3.

> A worker in an automobile plant described how his boss, a bench foreman, seemingly obsessed with the fear of lay-off, rushed around doing everything possible to slow up the work and thus postpone the evil day for himself and his subordinates.10

In another example from a large automobile plant, where the workers agreed among themselves on a ceiling for bonus earnings on grinding valves, Mathewson quoted a worker who believed the foreman and the general foreman supported the ceiling: "They don't want the rate cut any more than we do. It just makes the men sore and causes a lot of trouble."[11]

These, and the other examples Mathewson used from the auto industry in 1929 and early 1930, provide clear evidence that restriction of output occurred among the overwhelmingly non-union auto workers. But such restraints were not universal. Closer relationships did develop between skilled workers and formerly skilled worker foremen, or between workers and foremen in areas of the plant where superintendents and plant managers allowed a certain flexibility of output. But where the final processes of automobile assembly were involved, with continuously moving conveyor lines, and especially after 1928 as auto profits and production crumbled, pockets of arbitrary improvements in working conditions were eliminated. Another contemporary account provides a valuable corrective to any tendency to assume that workers had any systematic control over their working environment in the late

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10. Stanley B Mathewson, Restriction of Output among Unorganized Workers, (New York: Viking Press, 1931), 40.

11. ibid, 45.

1920s. Robert Dunn quotes a worker at Dodge Main in 1927 saying, "In Department 66 only the bosses and their friends are working. The other workers are sent home."[12] Another man who worked in Department 64 in the year Walter Chrysler bought Dodge Main told Dunn:

> We are allowed to stop work about 15 minutes to bolt our lunch, but we are not provided with a place to eat it. We either sit at our benches in the dusty room or, when there is nothing else for one to sit on, we have to sit on the floor. Besides, they work the sweepers on another shift and they are sweeping the floors right under our noses while we are trying to eat our lunches.[13]

Thus although there was some restriction of output, and even an occasional strike,[14] the general experience of auto workers involved in building and assembling the cars was that while conditions were extremely tough in the car market boom of the 1920s, they became desperate in the years from 1930 to 1933.

Insecurity

As the Great Depression took hold, the auto industry employers cut drastically jobs and wages. The most loyal and hard-working employee was not safe. The proportion of auto workers laid off for anything from a shift to a few months rose from 49.7% in 1930 to 86.2% in 1932. Still more devastating, and against the trend in US manufacturing, the number laid off who

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12. Robert W Dunn, Labor and Automobiles, (New York: International Publishers, 1929), 103.

13. ibid, 146.

14. John Anderson recalled taking part in a three or four day strike of metal finishers against a cut in the piecework rate at Fisher Body Plant 18 in Detroit in the spring of 1929; see John W Anderson and Steve Jefferys, op cit, Chapter 2.

were also "separated" - that is, told there would be no guarantee of more work in the future - rose from 70.2% in 1930 to 98.9% in 1932. The effects were considerable. Previously those regularly laid off and separated had been the traditional "disposable" semi-skilled and unskilled sector. In 1932, the entire workforce, including the 10-15% of skilled workers, was affected, creating a common grievance.[15] To job insecurity was added pay insecurity: average weekly earnings for those still at work in automobile, body and parts plants fell 43% from $35.14 in 1928 to $20 a week in 1932.[16]

John Zaremba, a graduate of Brown's Business School, Chicago, had worked as a time study man for GM in 1920 and as a clerical worker at Dodge Main from 1921 to 1923. Unable to get clerical work in the depression, he started back in Dodge Main as an operator in the heat treatment department in 1932. He recalls often going to work and being told by the foreman or superintendent not to bother clocking in. But the bonus, or lack

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15. Dunn, op cit, 61, quotes the 1924 breakdown by Professor Charles Reitell of the auto industry labour force:

	%
Machine tenders	25-40
Assemblers	10-15
'Skilled' workers	5-10
Inspectors	5
Helpers	15
Labourers	15

16. Fine, op cit, 20.

of it, was an even bigger grievance:

> The bonus was a farce at all times. We never knew what we were going to receive as pay, whether it was going to be 50c, 61c, 71c or 76c...the amount of the bonus was a 'secret'. Everybody would work and work and work. It seemed the more we worked, the less bonus we got.17

John W Anderson, a University of Wisconsin graduate, was hired as a metal finisher at Dodge Main on December 2 1932:

> To hold my job I had to work continuously from 12 to 14 hours a day, seven days a week from the day I was hired until 7 pm on Christmas Eve... On December 24 the foreman told me, "You're being laid off until further notice. We'll call you when we need you." During those 23 days I worked almost 300 hours and at 52 cents per hour I earned about $150. There was no premium pay for overtime or working Saturday or Sunday, yet we metal finishers were among the highest paid in the industry.18

Auto managements treated the labour of the "suitcase brigade", the pool of 75,000 young unmarried men in Detroit, without respect or sentiment.

In December 1933 a report on the Dodge Main Drop Forge department highlighted three areas of uncertainty for its workers: the peak employment in the department had been 250, it was now 230, and in the "slow season" varied between 75 and 130; hourly rates ranged from 54c to 96c, and hourly earnings (bonus included) from 65c to $1.85; the hours worked each week also varied between 30 and 35.[19] All three factors, whether an individual was laid

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17. John Zaremba, Wayne State University, Walter Reuther Library, Oral History Archives [abbreviated to WSU in future references], August-October 1961, 4.

18. Harry Ross Collection, Walter Reuther Library [in future references abbreviated to WRL] Box 3, Report dated December 11 1933.

19. Anderson and Jefferys, op cit, Chapter 3.

off or recalled, the rate and bonus, and the number of working hours, were determined by the foreman, general foreman or superintendent.

Managerial power over workers' pay and hours was essentially arbitrary. Often the supervisor had the personal authority to recruit family or friends or workers from a similar ethnic background.[20] The alternative was to queue from 3 a.m. outside a plant's employment office that opened at 8 a.m. Those lucky enough to get inside might have to wait until 9 p.m. to be told whether they were hired or not.[21] Foremen had the power of instant dismissal. Workers tied to a moving line were dependent on them for any relief. A Ford worker, Kenneth Bannon, recalled conditions at the River Rouge in the Fall of 1936:

> If you wanted to go to the bathroom, you would have to get permission from the foreman. At times this permission was given and at other times it was denied. At the point it was denied there was nothing you could do about it. You were not allowed to talk to your fellow workers.[22]

In much of Dodge Main, where other conditions were not quite as bad as at the Rouge, workers were also not allowed to speak while working. Gertrude Nalezty started in Dodge Main's showcase first floor Wire Room in 1934:

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20. Anderson and Jefferys, op cit, Chapter 2; Greer, op cit, 89.

21. Harry Ross, WSU, 3.

22. Kenneth Bannon, WSU, February 28 1963, 1.

> Before the union you had to work fast. The supervisors were on your back all the time. Once the whistle blew you could say "Good morning" or "Good afternoon", but that was that. You couldn't talk to one another while you worked.23

At Ford the debasing of workers' dignity went still further, as Bannon recalled:

> The lavatories were upstairs. I should not say upstairs, but they were up off the floor on poles...They were maybe eight or ten feet off the floor and when you were allowed to go to the washroom, it was not unusual for a serviceman to come in and want to know what you were doing, how long you were there and also to ask you to stand up if you were sitting down to see if you were lying or not.24

Here again was fertile ground for grievances.

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23. Interview by author with Gertrude Nalezty, August 10 1982. The Wire Room was a show department because it was a relatively clean department situated on the first floor near the main entrance to Dodge Main and the predominantly women workers were issued with blue overalls with the Dodge motif on them. Zaremba, WSU, 3, recalled conditions in the heat treatment department: "It was a cardinal sin to speak during working to your fellow workers."

24. Bannon, WSU, 3.

II. Year of change

In 1933 economic trends coincided with a political watershed. Chrysler recovered its pre-depression production levels in an industry producing 41% more cars than in 1932. US unemployment continued to rise until March 1933, but in Detroit the situation improved. This was particularly true of Chrysler whose production of its principal model line, the Plymouth, at its Dodge Main and new Plymouth Road plants, nearly quadrupled from 1930 to 1933.[25] Jobs in the automakers and in Briggs, which supplied Ford with car bodies, seemed more secure.

Political change

1933 also saw the inauguration of Franklin D Roosevelt, the New Deal President, on March 4. In November 1932 he had stood "for the building of plans that rest upon...the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid", promising federal relief to prevent starvation, and unemployment compensation.[26] Early in 1933 the new political atmosphere was already encouraging a minority of workers to assert basic democratic rights in the workplace. 1933 saw the biggest strike wave in American labour

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25. Chrysler Corporation, Financial and General Fact Book (Detroit: 1973), 81: new Plymouth registrations rose from 64,301 in 1930 to 249,667 in 1933. [This source will be abbreviated in future to Chrysler, Fact.]

26. Cited in Irving Bernstein, Turbulent Years, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), 2.

history.[27] In Detroit it began in the Briggs body plants.

Briggs plants were known in Detroit in the late 1920s and early 1930s as "slaughter houses". Working conditions were considered some of the worst in the industry. In January 1933 new labour hired at its Highland Park plant to cope with increased demand for 1933 models quickly found management cutting the hiring rate for metal finishers from the 52 cents promised (and being paid at Dodge) to 35 cents an hour. After the third reduction in successive weeks, the men stopped work and demanded an explanation. Their foreman told them: "If you don't like your job why don't you quit?" and, when they kept stopping or working slow, insisted: "Either go to work or quit!"[28] They walked out - and the presence of a few Communist Party members in Briggs, and the assistance of the CP's Auto Workers' Union (AWU) turned the flare-up into the first big auto industry strike.[29]

The strike showed that with organization workers could direct their anger effectively against the auto companies. It was a partial victory. Those who struck and stayed out were not re-hired when the strike was called off on May 1. But their action

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27. P K Edwards, op cit, Table 4A, 258.

28. Anderson and Jefferys, op cit, Chapter 3.

29. For two complementary accounts of the 1933 Briggs strike see Anderson and Jefferys, op cit, Chapter 3 and Keeran, op cit, Chapter 4.

forced Briggs and several other companies to increase their rates and stopped the spate of price-cutting throughout the industry.[30] It also led to the dispersal of several now-experienced strikers to other Detroit plants and helped encourage the wave of strikes that took off especially after August 26 1933, when Roosevelt signed the "Code of Fair Competition for the Automobile Manufacturing Industry". This code came under the terms of the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), and was published and distributed widely in Detroit as a 5c pamphlet. A strike of dingmen (metal repairers), one of the most skilled groups of autoworkers, then broke out at Dodge Main against,

> *Chiselling by the Chrysler Corporation at all plants.
> *Trying to break in new dingmen while there are dingmen still out of jobs.
> *Chrysler Corporation trying to flood dingmen labour market and cut wages.[31]

It was "squelched" within 48 hours, Zaremba recalled, because even this group were scared of being marked out as troublemakers. But Chrysler's refusal to listen to the fears of such a key group caused widespread resentment and determined many individual workers to try to change management's attitude.[32]

The National Recovery Administration (NRA) code laid down minimum employment conditions which were entirely acceptable to the National Automobile Chamber of Commerce: a 43c an hour

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30. Keeran, op cit, 95.

31. Frank Marquart Collection, WRL, Box 3.

32. Zaremba, WSU, 3.

minimum wage in cities with populations over 500,000; those employed not to be worked more than an average 35 hours a week; and a special clause, exclusive to the automobile industry, that allowed the employers to discriminate "on the basis of individual merit".[33] But the code did contain the NIRA's Section 7(a):

> Employees shall have the right to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing, and shall be free from the interference, restraint or coercion of employers of labour, or their agents, in the designation of such representatives or in self-organization or in other concerted activities for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid or protection.34

This gave workers the confidence of knowing that their self-organization had the backing of the law - whatever their employers said or did. Union membership became "American" and gained a formal legality overnight. In Detroit the Auto Workers' Union, the Industrial Workers of the World, the newly-formed Mechanics Educational Society of America and the American Federation of Labor all recruited thousands of workers. Union activism did not instantly appear 'legitimate' in all workers' eyes, however. Union 'legitimacy' depended crucially not on the law but upon three other elements: some degree of management recognition, a high level of worker involvement and evidence of its effectiveness. In 1933 each of these elements was missing.

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33. Bernstein (1969), op cit, 95.

34. National Recovery Administration, Code of Fair Competition, No 1403-1-04, 8; in Ross Collection, WRL, Box 3.

AFL Activity

In June 1933 when Roosevelt signed the NIRA, AFL president William Green, under pressure from United Mine Workers' president John L Lewis, the only major industrial union, assigned four full-time organizers to recruiting the country's half a million auto workers.[35] They were not exactly the most dynamic organizers Green could find, and they were given a hopeless strategy: to organize all the autoworkers first into federal (AFL) locals covering each plant; and then to divide up those recruited into their respective AFL craft unions. William Collins of the International Association of Machinists established his headquarters in Detroit, and within a month of the launch of the Automobile Code, the first AFL meeting was held at Dodge Main.[36]

Nineteen workers attended the UAW Dodge inaugural meeting on Sunday afternoon, September 24 1933, but only five knew each other. John Panzner, one of Collins' staff, chaired the meeting and explained the Federal Labor Union charter, Local No 18277, that had been issued to Dodge employees. He then organized the election of officers. Harold Padget was ready to run for president as he had been laid off from the trim department in 1929 and was still not back at work. Jack L Andrews was elected

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35. Keeran, op cit, 100.

36. The AFL meeting was preceded by an August 1933 meeting in the Cass Technical High School where two Detroit congressmen explained Section 7A of the NIRA to an audience that included several auto workers, Dodge Main News, May 10 1952 [in future references abbreviated to DMN].

vice-president, and wrote the names of those present on a blackboard so they could get to know each other. He was a company spy.[37] Eight days later the five workers from the fifth floor trim department cushion line who attended the meeting were fired. Harry Ross recalls his foreman coming up to him and his partner on the cushions, a man who had worked 20 years at Dodge Main, asking, "What have you two guys been doing? I have just got orders to fire both of you." Zaremba survived: he had given the spy a fictitious name.[38]

In October Panzner spoke to the Union of Automobile Workers' second Dodge meeting,

> about how we should git the employees to gether and about forming a council of all locals to work hand in hand and to git things a rolling in this City to git all Factorys organized and to have a strong union in the Automobil district.[sic]39

The Dodge federal local drew up a programme of demands to submit to the management. They raised the issues affecting all autoworkers in the early and mid-1930s: the bonuses and the piece rate system; job security and employment; regulation of the speed of

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37. Frank Marquart Collection, WRL, Box 3, Local 18277 Minute Book, September 24 1933. In 1933 Chrysler spent $61,627 on labour espionage. Andrews later befriended Richard Frankensteen, president of the 'independent' Chrysler union and sent daily reports to Corporations Auxilliary, the spying company employed by Walter Chrysler ever since he had used its services while working for GM. They paid Andrews $40 a month for his reports and charged Chrysler $9 a day; DMN, May 10 1952.

38. Harry Ross, WSU, 7-12; Zaremba, WSU, 5.

39. Local 18277 Minutes, October 6 1933.

work; favouritism; and payment for lost time.

But at the same moment handfuls of auto workers were uniting in federal union locals and drawing up demands, two developments occurred to undermine these early moves to some degree of worker autonomy. First, the AFL Executive Council forced Green to issue instructions forbidding AFL organisers putting toolmakers, die makers,[41] maintenance men and machinists in federal locals. The movement to build an industrial union was sabotaged by the policies of the craft International Association of Machinists.[42] Second, the auto makers launched their counter-offensive. Ford tightened his repressive regime. The Edward G Budd Company of Philadelphia, body builders and owners of the British Pressed Steel Company plant at Cowley, openly defied the new Labor Board.[43] But Chrysler and GM, meanwhile, dressed up anti-trade

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40. DMN, May 10 1952.

41. Bernstein (1969), op cit, 95.

42. John Anderson confirmed the sense of betrayal experienced by young union-minded auto workers in 1933 when, having at first supported the building of federal local unions, it dawned upon them that the AFL would soon split the workers up into their various trade groups; Anderson and Jefferys, op cit, Chapter 4.

43. For many years Budd had produced a company magazine called The Buddgette, full of interviews with "Buddites"; Dunn, op cit, 156. The company saw the way forward to turn its paternalism into a company union. But when a strike by around 1,000 of its 4,000 workers took place to force recognition of the AFL, Budd successfully defied both Regional and National Labor Board rulings that the company should hold a proper election - a defiance which eventually helped lead to the 1935 Supreme Court where the NIRA itself was declared unconstitutional; Fine, op cit, 194-202. Paradoxically, the Budd Company's Cowley plant was the first in which production workers were unionised in Britain after a key strike in 1934; Dave Lyddon, "Workplace organization in the British Car Industry: a critique of Jonathan Zeitlin", History Workshop, No.15 (Spring 1983), 135.

unionism[44] in legal clothes by launching company union schemes. These were essentially safety valves: works councils, usually of long-service employees, would funnel grievances to management without the need for any bargaining. After the NIRA delivered its boost to union organisation in 1933, such schemes became very popular among employers determined to prevent "outsiders" interfering with their managerial prerogatives - the contemporary view of unions[45] - but who baulked at outright law-breaking. There were, however, significant differences between the Chrysler and GM works council schemes which subsequently played a large part in shaping their shop floor union traditions.

Works Councils

In October 1933 Walter Chrysler put his personal imprint on the plan for "Employee Representation in the Plants of Chrysler Motors". In a letter distributed with the plan he wrote:

> As a former shop-worker I have long looked forward to the time when the Employees and the Management of the Chrysler Corporation would sit down around a table to discuss and decide matters of mutual interest to all of us.46

And the proposals stated baldly:

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44. Shown in the October 2 1933 firings at Chrysler referred to above; and in the large sums spent by both Chrysler and GM on company anti-union spies between 1933 and 1937. Thus Dodge worker, W. Montowski, a metal finisher clock no T369, confessed to being paid $40 a month plus expenses by Corporation Auxilliary for reporting on the activities of successively Local 18277, the Dodge AIWA locals and then UAW Local 3, from January 24 1934 until January 26 1937; Zaremba Collection, WRL, Box 9.

45. Bernstein (1969), op cit, 39-40, cites a contemporary BLS survey of 593 company unions that found that 378 of them had been established during the NRA period. The BLS survey found: "The great majority...were set up entirely by management. Management conceived the idea, developed the plan, and initiated the organization."

46. Employee Representation Plan and letter in Zaremba Collection, WRL, Box 6.

Purpose. This is a Plan which provides an opportunity for the Employees to have an equal voice with the Management in deciding jointly all matters affecting wages and working conditions.

In fact the Dodge Main Joint Council was to be made up of 53 appointed supervisors and staff workers and 53 elected employee representatives, and issues could only be decided on a two-thirds majority.

Neither the handful of AFL members at Dodge Main and Chrysler's new Plymouth plant nearby and at the older Kercheval and Jefferson plants, nor the even smaller numbers of AWU members, tried to mobilize resistance to the company union plan. Its hint of coming improvements in wages and working conditions were too promising to be opposed. The plan was adopted with 95% in favor in a secret referendum and the first employee elections were held early in 1934.[47] In contrast to the fate of the GM company union scheme, and certainly against the intentions of its creators, Chrysler's works councils over the next three years acted as midwife to an active shop floor trade unionism.[48]

GM's company union plan, drawn up in July 1933 was much more

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47. Zaremba Collection, WRL, Box 1.

48. Fine, op cit, 161; while he misses the link between the Chrysler plan and an early and active shop floor trade unionism, also notes the different impact the company union plans had on Chrysler and GM workers, and puts it down to what can be summarized as a greater sophistication on the part of GM: "The difference in the reaction of the employee representatives in the two corporations probably stemmed from a dissatisfaction with the joint-council type of plan used by Chrysler and from the less intransigent attitude in dealing with their workers of at least some of the GM plant managers."

modest.[49] For several years it had operated an Industrial Mutual Association of Flint which had provided club houses, bowling alleys, billiard tables and all the trappings of a self-running benevolent society that in practice was at GM's beck and call.[50] Confident from this experience, GM did not feel obliged to seek the double-edged legitimacy of Chrysler's plan by calling a ballot.[51] It simply imposed its plan. And the following year it issued a policy statement on labour-management relations which made clear that its "collective bargaining" did "not imply the assumption by the employee of a voice in those affairs of management which management, by its very nature, must ultimately decide upon its own responsibility."[52] These early differences would later have profound consequences.[53]

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49. The plan was drafted by the future GM director of industrial relations, Merle C Hale, following a meeting of divisional managers.

50. Dunn, op cit, 152.

51. Fine, op cit, 155.

52. Cited, ibid, 288.

53. Harris, op cit, 29, describes Chrysler management in the late 1930s as "ideologically antiunion and politically reactionary". But Harris' [23] three categories of 1930s management industrial relations policies: "persistent antiunionism; realistic accommodation and adaptation; and the progressive approach" - don't quite capture the mixture of welfarism, paternalism and antiunionism that led both Chrysler and GM to establish Works Councils. Indeed, perhaps instead of a rigid line between "antiunionism" and "realism", a better understanding would be reached if GM and Chrysler's policy were both seen as being "realistically antiunion" - with subsequent differences emerging from the different realities the two firms faced.

CHAPTER 5

THE ROOTS OF RESISTANCE

1933-1936

The particular features of the frontier of control in Dodge Main in the 1940s and 1950s developed from the interaction of management and workers in Detroit during the early and mid-1930s.[1] The works council unified the highly-concentrated plant in a period of rapid expansion, and brought together potential organizers. But it did not provide the genuine representation Chrysler had promised; nor was managerial authority significantly less arbitrary. In this situation the organizational encouragement of Detroit's nationally-known 'Radio Priest', Father Coughlin, was decisive. Dodge workers formed an 'independent' union modelled on Coughlin's National Union for Social Justice. The first section of Chapter 5 examines the complex way sectional representation gained workplace legitimacy for both management and managed. The second section considers the 'independent' union that rooted itself in Dodge Main in 1935 and 1936.

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1. Friedlander adds that it is only possible to understand the development of the UAW in the 1940s and 1950s through "an analysis of its roots in structures set in motion in the formative years"; op cit, 112.

I. The sources of militancy

The sheer size and concentration of Dodge Main ensured that its works council played a part in the unionizing process. An average, in the middle and late 1930s, of 35,000 workers occupied 5.1 million square feet of floorspace packed into 30 acres.[2] As Figure 3 shows (on the following page) the complex was highly compact with nine major buildings linked together. The eight story body building was connected to the pressed steel building on the second, third and fourth floors, and to the assembly building no. 2 on the fifth and sixth floors.

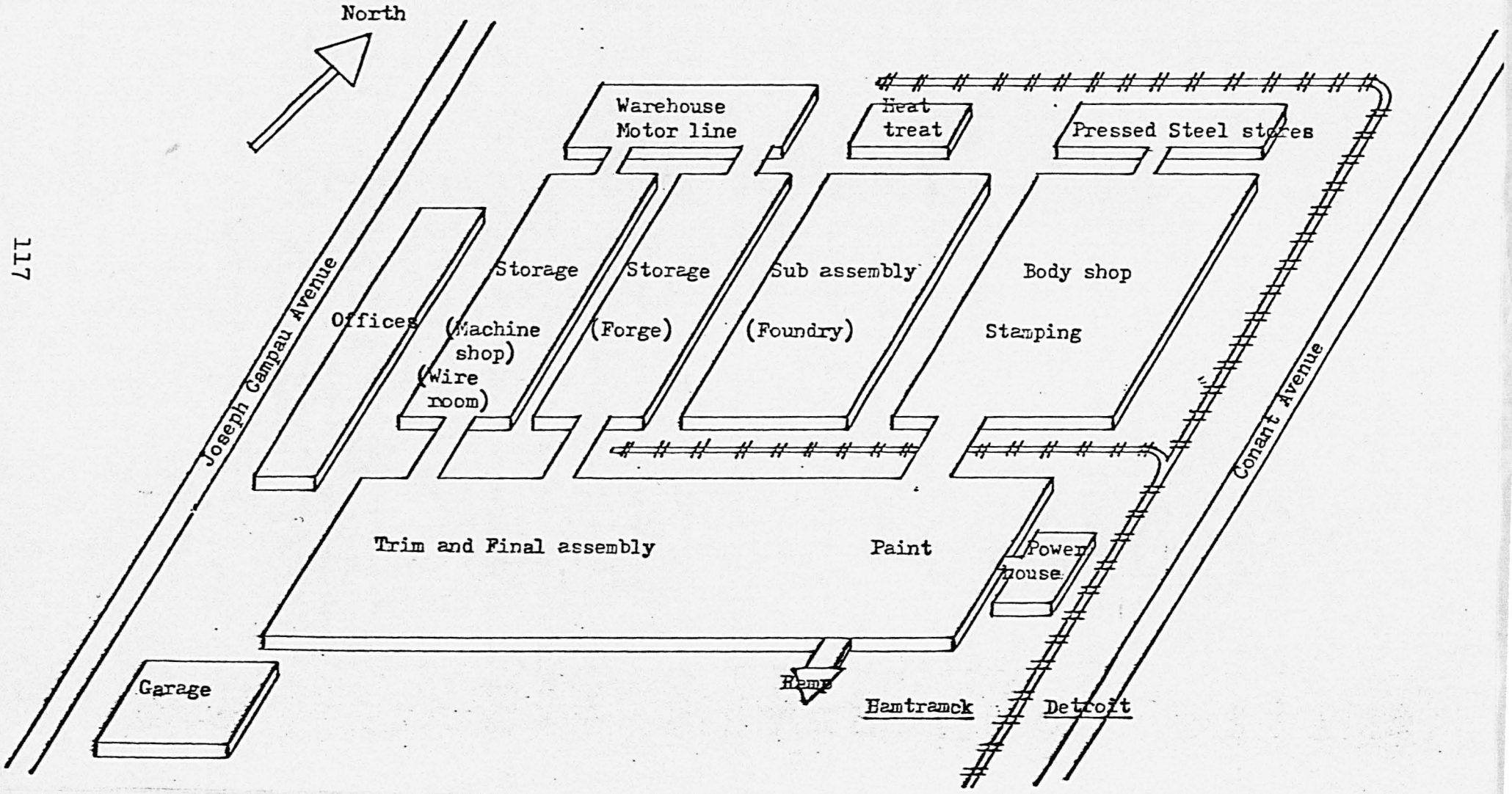
Physical concentration

Like Henry Ford, the Dodge brothers and Walter Chrysler believed in integrating the manufacturing process. Casting, forging and heat treating were carried out in single-storey buildings that allowed adequate ventilation. Other buildings were multi-storey,parts being received and stored on the ground floor, which also housed the heaviest machinery. Higher floors carried the conveyors that snaked almost randomly through the complex. Body-in-white, painting, and enamelling processes were completed on different floors before being taken by other conveyors and

2. Hyde, op cit, 23; he points out that the new General Motors Cadillac plant being built on the same site and scheduled to start operations in 1985, requires 465 acres for a plant of just 3 million square feet.

Dodge Main Site

following Hyde, op cit, 34, and Liska, sketch.



elevators to the higher floors of one of the two assembly buildings for trimming. The cars then passed to the second floor final assembly lines. There, the bodies were dropped on to the completed chassis before the cars were driven down a ramp and out to the test building. A reinforced-concrete construction was supported internally by concrete columns which divided the working space - already confined to long segments no more than 100 feet wide - into narrow aisles just 25 or 30 feet across.[3]

The high degree of integration and the physically constricting work situation facilitated contact between workers with a common interest in collective organization. It ensured that news of disputes and grievances was generalized throughout the complex, encouraging a heightened sense of plant-wide work group identity. In this situation the works council then made its mark bringing together about 50 manual workers from all areas of the complex. Between the first works council meeting, in the winter of 1933-1934,[4] and the last, in February 1937, at least 150 workers met in company time. It was a far cry from most GM plants,[5] where the chairman of an eight or ten person works

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3. ibid, 20-25.

4. While Fine writes, op cit, 337-344, as if the Dodge Automotive Labor Board "bargaining agency" was first formed in February 1935, there are at least two explicit documentary references in Zaremba, WRL, Box 1, and Marquart, WRL, Box 3, to indicate a continuous presence of the Dodge Main Works Council from late 1933 or early 1934, in addition to the circumstantial evidence that Chrysler was unlikely to wait 16 months from the 95% approval of the plan before putting it into operation.

5. Anderson and Jefferys, op cit, Chapter 5, for Fleetwood Fisher Body.

council would either conduct all discussions personally with the plant manager or invite him or a single management representative to attend meetings.[6] The Chrysler works councils fostered an 'us' against 'them' consciousness among a sizeable layer of manual workers.

Job security

Workers' collective confidence was also encouraged at Dodge Main by the knowledge that they were in a significantly different labour market environment than those at GM and Ford. They manufactured most of the parts for Chrysler's top-selling Plymouth car, and, between 1928 and 1936 assembled the DeSoto and the Dodge. Ford's rival Model A and, from 1932, V-8 were built mainly at the giant extended River Rouge plant, while the Chevrolet was turned out from the tens of different plants that comprised GM's Chevrolet division based mainly in Flint. Table 5 compares the annual change in new registrations:

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6. Fine, op cit, 157-158. Kruchko also argues that the works councils GM organized at its Norwood Chevrolet and Fisher Body plants "provided the Norwood worker with a valuable nucleus of labour leaders"; op cit, 64.

TABLE 5
CAR REGISTRATIONS OF CHRYSLER, GM AND FORD LEADING MODELS, 1931-1941

Year	Chrysler		General Motors	Ford
	Plymouth	Dodge/DeSoto	Chevrolet	Model A/V-8
	% change	% change	% change	% change
1931	+ 47	- 18	- 6	-50
1932	+ 19	- 35	-45	-51
1933	**+123**	**+101**	**+47**	**+20**
1934	+ 21	- 5	+13	+71
1935	+ 27	+103	+23	+56
1936	+ 30	+ 48	+42	- 9
1937	- 7	- 13	-17	+ 2
1938	- 38	- 41	-40	-53
1939	+ 22	+ 68	+29	+32
1940	+ 26	+ 12	+43	+13
1941	+ 3	+ 9	+ 3	+11
Average annual change 1931-1941:	+ 25%	+ 21%	+ 8%	+ 4%

SOURCE: Chrysler, Facts.

Chrysler workers were concentrated in a single integrated complex that, between 1931 and 1941, expanded output nearly three times faster than GM's Chevrolet Division and five times faster than the Rouge. This gave Dodge production workers much more regular work and skilled workers near permanent employment. The disparity with GM was particularly sharp in 1933, when both companies launched their company union plans.

Political contradiction

The expectations of a new era of democratic rights aroused by FDR in 1933 were first echoed by Walter Chrysler and then effectively dashed in 1934 and 1935. Though promised discussions on "wages and working conditions", the workers were fobbed off, as District 23 employee representative Zaremba recalled:

> It was nauseating for us to listen to the company recite about holes to be repaired in the floors and windows to be repaired in the departments.7

Dick Frankensteen had worked at Dodge from 1926 to 1928 while he attended night school at the University of Detroit, and had then graduated from the University of Dayton, Ohio, in 1932. He found himself back in the Dodge trim department in 1933 and was elected District 7 employee representative the following year. A quarter of a century later he remarked:

> As for the Works Council, we bargained for clean windows and floors without grease, and many things that were important but meaningless in take-home pay. When it came to dollars and cents, when it came to economics, we were powerless.8

This resentment was felt sharply by those taking part, and began to surface when Chrysler's growth got into full swing and individual workers gained the confidence to raise issues on the works council that challenged unilateral managerial authority.

In July 1935 one worker representative proposed Chrysler operate district-based seniority lists to govern lay-offs and

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7. Zaremba, WSU, 8.

8. Richard Frankensteen, WSU, October 1959-December 1961, 5.

recalls. It was defeated on the Dodge Main works council by 50 votes to 40. At the same meeting only 25 votes were recorded for the right of employee representatives to take a witness in with them when they met management. Only a small minority was ready to challenge managerial authority. A week later, however, Frankensteen was amazed when he won the coveted two thirds majority after several staff workers used the cover of the works council secret ballot to vote for his proposal for a 10% rise in earnings. They felt entitled to challenge management on the terms of subordination but not on its content. The proposal was carried by 60 votes to 33 but was summarily rejected by Chrysler Vice President in charge of manufacturing, W J O'Neill, the Dodge Main General Manager who chaired the Joint Council.

Management's first reaction was to see the two facets of its control as indissoluble. Its power to set wage rates was defended as vigorously as its authority to lay-off or recall whoever it wished. Two months earlier O'Neill had instructed the representatives:

> I don't want you fellows to think because you don't get a 15% increase, and 65c rate, that this isn't Collective Bargaining.9

To make Chrysler's refusal to negotiate collectively on wages still clearer, management then sacked J H Campbell, the chairman of the employee representatives' side. A management representative explained:

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9. Frank Marquart Collection, WRL, Box 3. Dodge Main Works Council minutes, May 2 1935.

He made a slur on the President of the Chrysler Corporation when he made the statement that there were hidden profits.10

Instead of being a forum for management-employee togetherness, the Works Council fostered anti-management resentment among those workers who took part by legitimizing the articulation of certain demands while simultaneously turning them down.

Catholic respectability

The final element that made Dodge Main exceptional by comparison with most GM plants, was its location in Hamtramck, the 'Poletown' of the United States. In 1940 there were 22 foreign language publications being published in Detroit,[11] and a high proportion of Dodge Main's workers were Polish, Catholic or both. Many, including several who became Dodge employee representatives, were heavily influenced in the late 1920s and mid-1930s by an anti-Communist populist priest based in the Detroit suburb of Royal Oak.

Father Charles E Coughlin was known throughout the United States as the Radio Priest. His demagogic Sunday night broadcasts on the WJR radio station began in 1926 and continued with only a few interruptions until 1940. To an audience which, in the early

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10. ibid, July 3, July 11 1935.

11. Polenberg, op cit, 36.

1930s, frequently reached up to forty million people,[12] he preached a virulent anti-Communism in harness with vehement denunciations of Prohibition and advocacy of the Catholic social philosophy of equality, justice and class collaboration laid down in Pope Leo XIII's 1891 Rerum Novarum, On the Condition of the Working Class. This argued that Catholic clergy should fight for just and moral reforms in industrial society. Pope Pius X's encyclical of 1912, Singulari quodam, took this further and acknowledged workers' rights to form trade unions, but added:

> Trade unions must not engage in any act or theory which does not concur with the teachings and instructions of the Church or of the relevant religious authority.[13]

Coughlin's pitch was directed at workers hit hard by the Depression and who wanted to get good-paying jobs in the land of opportunity. He attacked employers who denied workers jobs or employed them as "modern industrial slaves". In July 1930 he told a congressional enquiry into domestic subversion that "The greatest force in the movement to internationalize (ie Communize) labour throughout the world is Henry Ford." In the 1932 presidential campaign Coughlin strongly attacked Hoover's record, and in 1933 openly endorsed Roosevelt with slogans such as "Roosevelt or Ruin" and "The New Deal is Christ's Deal".[14]

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12. Brinkley, op cit, 83.

13. Cited in Denis Moniere, Le developpement des ideologies au Quebec, (Montreal: Editions Quebec/Amerique, 1977), 257. I would like to thank Gregor Murray for this reference to the origins of Catholic trade unionism in Canada. Coughlin himself was born in and studied theology in Canada before being appointed to serve in Detroit in 1923; Brinkley, op cit, 84-88.

14. Brinkley, op cit, 97-102.

In 1934 as Roosevelt distanced himself from Coughlin, the Radio Priest responded by trying to turn his Radio League of the Little Flower into a more organized political pressure group. The National Union for Social Justice, launched in a radio sermon in November 1934, was intended, Coughlin said, to allow his listeners "to organize for social united action which will be founded on God-given social truths".[15] The National Union's preamble began:

> Establishing my principles upon this preamble, namely, that we are all creatures of a beneficent God, made to love and serve Him in this world and to enjoy Him forever in the next; and that all this world's wealth of field and forest, of mine and river has been bestowed upon us by a kind Father, therefore, I believe that wealth as we know it originates from the natural resources and from the labour which the sons of God expend upon these resources.
>
> It is all ours except for the harsh, cruel and grasping ways of wicked men who first concentrated wealth into the hands of a few, then dominated states and finally commenced to pit state against state in the frightful catastrophes of commercial warfare...16

The National Union never got off the ground, but the momentum carried over into his Detroit autoworker constituency. Coughlin opposed his supporters joining the AFL in 1934 and 1935. The AFL's craft structure was hostile to Coughlin's Catholic constituency of unskilled or semi-skilled recent immigrants and, in any case, the AFL was too distant from the Catholic church and was infiltrated by "racketeers" and "gangsters". But Coughlin did encourage the transformation of Chrysler's employee representation scheme into

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15. ibid, 133.

16. ibid, 287.

an 'independent' union based on his Catholic principles of industrial unionism.[17] His contribution to the unionizing process was his Catholic legitimacy. It allowed native American and first and second generation Polish workers to accept that union organization was morally justified.

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17. ibid, 200.

II. An 'Independent' Union

In the spring of 1935, frustration grew among the second wave of employee representatives elected in January and February. It became increasingly clear Chrysler was not prepared to allow the Works Council to become a bargaining forum. On Coughlin's advice the employee representatives met on their own on April 9 1935 and decided to issue dues cards for an Automotive Industrial Workers' Association (AIWA). An eight point charter, probably drawn up at one of the regular Friday evening meetings of activists held at Coughlin's house,[18] was adopted. The objects of the AIWA were:

> To promote the interests of those engaged in the automotive and allied industries by improving working conditions, by fostering better cooperation between employers and employees, and by promoting and fostering legislation tending to better the welfare and interests of the said employees.19

The expectations raised by Chrysler's Works Council company union plan had, in the religious-cum-ethnic community-conscious world of Detroit in the early 1930s[20], given rise to a non-skilled, Catholic-led 'independent' union. The AIWA's first year book, issued on December 14 1935, was dedicated to "our advisor and supporter Father Charles E Coughlin, the friend and educator of

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18. Zaremba, WSU, 14.

19. Zaremba Collection, WRL, Box 1; Minutes of Employee Representatives Meeting, April 9 1935.

20. Friedlander, op cit, provides an insightful description of this world.

the masses".[21]

AFL eclipsed

The AFL federal local based on Dodge still existed, but its membership was tiny. Its activities were largely restricted to endorsing correspondence conducted by Collins or Green with Chrysler management or the Automotive Labor Board. In its first year, the only recruitment recorded in the minutes was of 12 members in April and eight in May 1934. Such was its impotence that Jack Andrews, the company spy, was able to remain vice president until October 1934, whereupon he turned his attention to Dick Frankensteen, the trim department worker who was soon to found the AIWA.[22] On March 24 1935, the local called a special meeting to take a strike vote.Twenty-nine voted in favour and none against, but no strike ensued. For in mid-1935 the AFL had only 178 members in all of Chrysler's Detroit plants.[23] In April 1935 the local agreed "shop stewards be appointed from each department", but could only find ten men present (including the

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21. Marquart Collection, WRL, Box 3. There were ten locals of the AIWA reported by this date. Six were in Dodge (including the Trim, Local 99, the Paint department and department 76, the body-in-white), and one each for Chrysler's Kercheval plant, Packard, Hudson and the Motor Products plants.

22. Marquart Collection, WRL, Box 3; Local 18277 Minute Book, April 10 1934, May 4 1934, October 10 1934. Padget was confirmed as president, while Jack Cousins, one of the cushion room workers dismissed the previous year, defeated Andrews as Vice President, and Harry Ross was elected Recording Secretary.

23. Fine, op cit, 407.

ubiquitous Andrews) ready to serve. With attendance dropping in the Fall, the local virtually disintegrated. Renamed Local 3 of the United Auto Workers after the August 1935 meeting of AFL Federal locals it called a special meeting to send a delegate to the UAW's first national convention in April 1936, and just reached a quorum of nine out of its 50 members.[24]

So weak was it that some members, including John Zaremba and Harry Ross, decided to work both in the company union scheme and in building the AIWA. Once the AIWA was established, they found themselves paying it 25c and the AFL $1 a month. The joint work of Frankensteen, Richard Harris, McIntyre, Ross, Cousins and Zaremba and, in particular, the regular meetings with Father Coughlin, paved the way for the AIWA and UAW to merge in 1936. The merger occurred because the South Bend UAW Convention declared its independence of the old craft-conscious AFL and because Coughlin, who spoke at the Convention, believed his AIWA, with an estimated 10,000 members in Chrysler, could become a leading force in the union. Although the Convention did not bar Communists from holding office, it did unanimously express "unalterable opposition to Fascism, Nazism and Communism and all other movements intended to distract the attention of the membership of the Labor movement

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24. ibid, Minutes, March 24, April 5, September 20 1935, April 17 1936.

from the primary objectives of unionism."[25] The AIWA negotiators, President Dick Frankensteen, Frank Szymanski and Dave Brann from Dodge Main and Vice President R J Thomas from Chrysler Kercheval, all destined to be important figures in the UAW factional struggles of the late 1930s, were cabled by Coughlin: "THERE CAN BE BUT ONE FOR SUCCESS STOP I URGE YOU TO AMALGAMATE".[26]

With Coughlin's backing, the merger was assured - although members' fears of 'outside' unions lead to a sizeable 35% voting against in a referendum.[27] The AIWA, the Hudson Motors' independent union and parts of the MESA joined, increasing the UAW's membership to some 25,000.[28] Frankensteen was put on the International Executive Board (IEB) and on the UAW payroll. On August 2 1936 "a meeting of all Locals in the Dodge Plant" was held "to form ONE BIG UNION OF THE ENTIRE PLANT".[29] Six months before winning recognition, the UAW overnight gained a mass membership in Chrysler plants and inherited a continuity of

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25. Cited in Keeran, op cit, 146. The CP tolerated this resolution since they didn't want to start a new fight on the matter after they had already got the constitutional proposal to ban CP members from holding office remitted to the Convention Constitutional Committee where they could bury it.

26. Marquart Collection, WRL, Box 3. According to one account Father Coughlin also spoke to the South Bend UAW Convention; I. Howe & B J Widick, The UAW and Walter Reuther, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1973) 13.

27. Friedlander, op cit, 116.

28. Wyndham Mortimer, Organize!, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 103.

29. Leaflet in Ross Collection, WRL, Box 3.

organization which had begun in 1933.

Evolution of shop stewards

A further contrast needs to be pointed out between the Chrysler and the GM works council schemes. Chrysler provided the employee representatives with "their regular average pay from the Company for the time actually spent in serving on such Council or Committee".[31] And soon after the Joint Council began operating, the Chrysler workers' representatives were also allowed paid time off to follow up grievances. The "Policy for Works Council and Employee Representatives Meetings" allowed them a monthly paid meeting on their own in addition to the Joint Council and stated,

> If for any reason the employee representative feels that in the normal discharge of his duties it is necessary for him to leave his work during working hours the permission of the foreman must be obtained before he takes such leave.[32]

In 1935 the AIWA organizers were able increasingly to use the privileges of company union representatives to act as *de facto* shop stewards.

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30. Only in a handful of other auto plants was there such a continuity of organization; one was White Motors, Cleveland, which won recognition in 1933, Mortimer, *op cit*, 66-67; another was Kelsey-Hayes, Detroit, where a core of at least 200 UAW members and a shop steward organization was kept together from 1933, Bert Cochran, *Labor and Communism*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), 114; Anderson & Jefferys, *op cit*, Chapter 4. Exactly how big the Chrysler membership was is open to some doubt. When the UAW bargaining committee met Chrysler on March 3 1937 it claimed 20,000 UAW members at Dodge Main, *DMN, Strike Bulletin*, March 9 1937. But Zaremba, WSU, 13, recalled that when Dodge Local 3 called the sit-down only some 800 out of the 24,000 manual workforce were actually paid-up members. Given the level of participation in the sit-down, and the degree of shop steward organization already in existence by then, it is likely Zaremba's figure was those who might attend Local 3 meetings. Total membership was definitely over 5,000 in 1936.

31. *Employee Representation in the Plants of Chrysler Motors*, October 1933, in Zaremba, WRL, Box 6.

32. Zaremba Collection, WRL, Box 6.

The AIWA constitution reflected the grass roots "American" democratic-individualism that appealed to its strongly ethnic membership. A local could be set up by any group of 25 or more workers and:

> 1. Every local shall have at least one shop steward and as many more as they find necessary.
> 2. Each shop steward shall have contact men who shall report and be responsible to him.
> 3. The duties of the shop steward shall be to aid the Financial Secretary in collecting dues and to see that each member's grievances are properly taken care of. He shall report to the Local at least once a month.33

By October 1936, when the first major clash occurred between the UAW and Chrysler, management were hoist on their own petard. They wanted to stop the stewards going around their departments organizing meetings, but had to agree when a shop steward-employee representative asked: "Are the Representatives permitted to leave their work for business reasons as they have been permitted in the past?"[34] Far from the privileges accorded to the employee representatives leading to greater identification with Chrysler, under the political impetus of Catholic social justice in a period of economic growth they had been transformed into their opposite: a tradition of elected departmental representatives being paid by the company to progress grievances and industrial action against

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33. Revised and Adopted AIWA Constitution, March 10 1936, in Zaremba Collection, WRL, Box 6. The constitution also provided that "Any member serving full time for the organization shall be paid no more than he or she can earn at his or her occupation", reflecting both the AIWA's recruitment of women and a distinct anti-privilege sentiment. The Coughlin influence expressed itself in the clause requiring a two-thirds majority for strike action.

34. Works Council minutes, October 16 1936, in Zaremba Collection, WRL, Box 1.

the company. And that wasn't all. Alongside these company-recognized stewards had developed a layer of union-recognized stewards who, frequently operating in the same way, were often indistinguishable from them. The AIWA, known in Detroit as "Coughlin's Union", was often called a "company union". But, as events would demonstrate, it was much more than that.[35]

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35. Brinkley is right to suggest "it did not deserve the label of 'a company union'"; but he is wrong to argue in Chapter 4: "but neither was the Automotive Industrial Workers Association at the center of the labour militancy that would ultimately produce the United Auto Workers". op cit, 200.

CHAPTER 6

REAL AMERICANS IN BATTLE

1936-1939

During the late 1930s the mass production industries were at the centre of a major battle between American management and workers. The first section of Chapter 6 describes how the failure of Chrysler management's attempt in 1936 to curb the UAW establishes a shop floor union legitimacy. The second section shows how the 1937 sit-down and settlement bolstered the independence of Chrysler stewards from the UAW. Section three traces the impact of the factional struggles within the UAW from 1937 to 1939 on union organization in Dodge Main, the union's largest organized plant.

I. 1936: Year of advance

The strength of the newly-amalgamated UAW was swiftly put to the test by Chrysler. On August 26 1936, 3,000 Dodge workers received letters telling them: "It does not appear at this time that our requirements will afford an opportunity to recall you to work."[1]

1. Marquart Collection, Box 3.

It was a deliberate attack upon the UAW. Harry Ross, dismissed first in 1933 and then reinstated by the Automotive Labor Board in 1934, was thrown out once more. So were hundreds of other shop stewards and union activists. Foremen were given special forms to record the names, badge numbers, class of worker and date of original employment of "undesirable" workers and those "we wish not to be returned". In the first category, the Department 76 list contained 18 names, all men with between two and five years' seniority in Dodge. Some of the "remarks" filled in by the body-in-white foremen were:

> Talks too much - continually objecting to the amount of work.
> Strong union man - hot headed. Liable to cause trouble.
> Agitator.
> Employee Representative. Active in Union.
> Trouble maker - Walked off the job, hot weather, July 10 1936.
> Communist.
> Strong union man - Does a lot of talking. Contact for Symanski.
> Hard to handle - liable to cause trouble.2

Against the names of a further 18 workers who no longer worked for Dodge, were comments like:

> Gave information to Dodge Worker paper detrimental to Dodge - Communist.
> Assumed name.
> Discharged drunk - active in Unions.
> Conduct detrimental to Dodge.

The firings came during the model changeover, a bad time for any immediate response, so the stewards waited until re-hiring for the 1937 model began. Then, following a leafletting campaign on the theme, "What security have you? None unless you act NOW", Local 3 organized a series of after-work departmental meetings to

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2. Lists in Ross Collection, WRL, Box 3.

take strike votes. They began on October 1 and were to build up to open mass meetings on October 14, 16 and 18. By October 12 the trim, warehouse, hammer, metal polishing, heat treatment, foundry and pressed steel departments had virtually unanimously backed the strike call (a total of just 11 workers voting against).[3]

The strength of resistance to this blatant discrimination flowed partly from growing economic confidence and partly from rising political confidence. Confidence had been growing among all car workers as year-on-year growth between 1933 and 1936 had nearly doubled average earnings:[4]

Model Year September-August	Average annual male earnings $
1933	749
1934	1,014
1935	1,294
1936	1,399

1936 was also K T Keller's first full year as Chrysler president, and he presided over the company's biggest operating margin on sales (11.4% before tax) since 1927.[5] Volume of output for Dodge Main's principal products, the Dodge and the Plymouth reached

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3. Leaflets and reports in Ross Collection, WRL, Box 1. How many workers actually attended these afterwork meetings is not known; but it was clearly enough to impress management.

4. Reported to the Automobile Manufacturers Association (that excluded Ford); cited in William H McPherson, Labor Relations in the Automobile Industry, (Washington DC: Brookings Institute, 1940), 98.

5. Table 4, page above, shows the decisive recovery in production and profits that occurred during Keller's first five years, from 1935 to 1939.

what proved to be a record for the 1930s as Table 6 shows:

TABLE 6
SALES OF CHRYSLER DODGE AND PLYMOUTH CARS, 1928-1941

Year	New sales Dodge/Plymouth (000s)	Dodge/Plymouth % of Chrysler production	Chrysler Market share %	Year	New sales Dodge/Plymouth (000s)	Dodge/Plymouth % of Chrysler production	Chrysler market share %
1928	178	53	10.7	1935	562	89	22.9
1929	201	58	8.9	**1936**	**748**	**88**	**25.0**
1930	128	57	8.6	1937	718	81	25.4
1931	147	65	12.0	1938	391	83	25.0
1932	140	73	17.5	1939	525	82	24.2
1933	336	87	25.8	1940	637	79	23.7
1934	393	91	22.9	1941	668	74	24.2

SOURCE: Chrysler, Facts

Keller would dearly have loved to have kept the UAW activists out of Dodge Main on the 1937 models. But he had drastically underestimated the UAW's strength. Management faced a dilemma: at a time when every car which Dodge Main turned out was certain to be sold, was it worth risking immediate profits to defeat a union that nationally still had under 50,000 members? Keller decided not. On October 16 1936, rather than face a strike, he announced the recall of all 1934 seniority workers including those previously 'separated'. The following week the retreat became a rout when all 1935 men were recalled, and on November 11 Chrysler conceded - three years before GM - time and a half overtime pay.[6]

6. Works Council Minutes, October 16, November 11 1936, in Zaremba Collection, WRL, Box 1; Anderson and Jefferys, op cit, Chapter 6.

Union 'Legitimacy'

This union success came just before Roosevelt's re-election to the presidency in November 1936. If the Chrysler victory was the spark to the subsequent wave of sit-downs, the flame was Roosevelt's massive defeat of the Republican candidate Alfred M Landon, a notorious anti-labour figure who was leader of the right-wing American Liberty League. Of the six months from May to November 1936, a Detroit Polish vehicle components worker recalled:

> As far as organization was concerned, the word union was never mentioned in the shop; and Detroit itself was quiet.7

But after the electoral confirmation of workers' rights, there was a sudden shift in consciousness. In the components' plant, the solitary union member became dozens; in Dodge Main the few thousand became many thousands. The Dodge Main victory directly contributed to that shift, and so helped lead directly to the recognition of the UAW by GM and Chrysler in the following six months.[8] It did so partly because it showed many Detroit workers that the 'Big Three" could be forced to make concessions, and partly because it raised upward comparability. Conditions won from one major manufacturer were now frequently demanded from

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7. Friedlander, op cit, 22.

8. Bernstein, op cit, 553.

another. But the most significant consequence was perhaps the least tangible: the victory 'legitimized' shop floor trade unionism at Dodge.

Chrysler management was seen by its workers, unionists and non-unionists, and by its supervisors and clerical staff, to extend de facto recognition and respect to shop floor elected representatives and their organization. In contrast to many other plants, the gains at Dodge were experienced by most workers as participants in a struggle. Self-organization rather than reliance upon a tiny number of activists, or upon the "the International" or "enlightened" management was seen to produce results. The legitimacy of 'do-it-yourself' unionism became accepted in the "plant consciousness" of Dodge Main[9] and most other Chrysler plants; as did the right of workers to participate in rule-making instead of it being controlled by outside officials from the international, as it was later.[10]

Chrysler management had backed off a confrontation with the UAW in 1936 and then witnessed with distaste a tremendous

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9. Beynon, op cit, 98, develops the idea of "working class factory consciousness" in ways that apply directly to the growing anti-boss politics that developed in Dodge Main in the 1930s. This he, argues has three aspects: [1] it provides an understanding of "class relationships in terms of their direct manifestation in conflict between the bosses and the workers within the factory"; [2] it is "rooted in the workplace where struggles are fought over the control of the job and the 'rights' of managers and workers"; and [3] it is "political" because it is concerned "with exploitation and power", but "it is a politics of the factory"; op cit, 206.

10. With this conception of what was 'legitimate', Chrysler workers would have a much greater say in the shaping of what David Brody has described as the post-war "workplace rule of law" than workers without it.

expansion in union numbers, confidence and organization. In December the Local 3 regular business meeting agreed to hold departmental meetings throughout the plant to "elect their Chief Steward, stewards and captains. Each elected man to be given a 30 day trial, if not competent then he should be removed."[11] In January 1937 regular meetings of chief stewards (black buttons) and sectional stewards (blue or white buttons) started up.[12] The constituency of the chief stewards tended to approximate to that of departmental general foremen and their superiors, the superintendents; stewards were elected by the section or appointed by the chief steward to cover every 25 workers or one for every sectional foreman or forelady.[13] By March there were 180 Chief Stewards in Dodge Main - representing a ratio of one to every 111 workers - and between 200 and 800 sectional stewards.[14] The steward system had arrived. It was not an exclusive elite or activist-only organization, but was seen by all union members - and many non-unionists - as a legitimate way of representing all interests within the department or section. This gave the stewards

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11. Dodge Local 3 Collection, WRL, Box 3; Business Meeting minutes, December 27 1936.

12. ibid, Box 4, Stewards' meeting, Minutes January 25 1937. All the chief stewards from one unit (like the foundry or trim) were supposed to meet and elect a "Captain"; but this idea appears to have dropped soon after it was proposed.

13. Zaremba, WSU, 28; Nalezty interview.

14. Stewards' Meeting Minutes, April 5 1937. The number of blue button stewards is difficult to estimate because their numbers varied enormously from area to area within the plant, and because their informal status has meant documentary evidence is not as forthcoming as for the chief steward system.

the authority not merely to speak for their members, but also to lead; and not only to propose but also to initiate action.

During the next three years two major developments took place to help root this shop steward organization more deeply in Chrysler plants than in those of GM - the 1937 sit-downs and resulting contracts, and a bitter internal UAW factional struggle. The result was to differentiate the union tradition between Chrysler and GM and to allow Chrysler workplace unionism to survive the 1938-39 recession and enter the war period of bitter conflict with management stronger than before.

II. Sit-downs

The apparent rapidity with which GM and Chrysler became reconciled to the presence of mass unionism after their defeat in the 1937 sit-downs should not obscure two significant qualifications to the impression of a relatively painless transition. First, GM's bitter resistance to the threat of workers exercising collective restraints over its managerial authority did not disappear overnight. It merely manifested itself differently. Second, Walter Chrysler and many other Detroit employers close to the strike-breaking National Metal Trades Association, whose Detroit branch secretary also doubled as the general manager of the Employers'

Association of Detroit,[15] remained openly hostile. The sit-downs and the settlements that followed changed workers' attitudes more than they did management's.

The minority acts

When it became clear GM was going to compromise in its 1937 sit-down battle with the UAW, Chrysler first tried to buy its way out of conflict, and agreed at the works council to pay a 5% premium to all second and third shift workers.[16] But the UAW had already won 46 of the 53 Districts of the Dodge Works Council[17] and once the first UAW agreement-to-bargain contract was signed with GM on February 11 1937, it was determined to win full recognition from Chrysler. Walter Chrysler intervened to insist on resistance. The union's strength was still untried; there was a chance it might crack. But even more important, only by resisting the UAW momentum might Chrysler management retain any initiative in determining the form of future collective bargaining. In particular Chrysler had noted GM's refusal to recognize shop stewards in its contract, and was determined to turn the tide back in its plants.

It was, however, too late. When Chrysler told Dick

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15. McPherson, op cit, 13-14.

16. Marquart Collection, WRL, Box 1: Works Council Minutes, February 9 1937.

17. Ross Collection, WRL, Box 3: Local 3 Membership meeting minutes, January 30 1937.

Frankensteen on March 8 that it would not recognize the UAW as the bargaining agency for all its workers it took just one phone call to John Zaremba inside Dodge to set the sit-down in motion. Zaremba raised his right hand in the pre-arranged signal and his blue button stewards told their sections:

> 'Shut it down!' From my department it snicked around...It crossed the docks again. People were waiting for a signal there too. 'Shut her down!' And this is just how it happened. Within five minutes after the signal was given from the outside, there was not one piece of machinery moving.18

The Dodge stewards organized the rapid closure of the plant and also ran the sit-down. The chief stewards became the Dodge Strike Committee on the first evening; and, again in contrast to most of the other occupied plants, the stewards immediately decided to bar superintendents, foremen and office staff from the factory.[19] After about two weeks they also threw out the security guards, then discovering the guards' cache of handguns, ammunition and tear gas.[20]

The sit-down tactic was employed because a walk-out by the minority of union members could not have halted production for long. So the unionization process represented a minority taking action with the passive support of the majority of workers. There

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18. Zaremba, WSU, 28; Zaremba Collection, Box 9, Account written by Zaremba in 1947 on flyleaf of "The Many and the Few".

19. Strike Bulletin, March 10, March 11 1937.

20. Zaremba Collection, WRL, Box 9.

were already some 10,000 UAW members in Chrysler plants when the GM sit-down began in December 1936, and possibly up to 20,000 out of the 67,000 total workforce when the Chrysler sit-down followed.[21] This proved most important. At GM the proportion of UAW members before the sit-downs was tiny - and the layer of union activists who experienced the struggle was much thinner than at Chrysler.

In Chrysler plants, as many as 6,000 workers[22] were actively involved. After four days the 450-strong Dodge body-in-white Department 76 boasted:

> ...the best record of any group in Dodge Main: over one third of its total membership sat in voluntarily. When one third of these were forced to go home (by the Strike Committee to cut the costs of feeding them all), there was a fight for the privilege of remaining.23

The same writer had explained in the first issue of the Dodge Strike Bulletin distributed to workers inside the plant and to those who came to offer support on the outside, why the sit-down movement commanded such support:

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21. An indication of the numbers of UAW members at Dodge Main in 1936-37 is given by the numbers of workers making the special trip to the Local 3 hall to vote in elections. In the elections held after the merger of the AIWA into the UAW in late summer or early fall 1936, 5739 votes were cast for the position of president. In May 1937 the vote for the three candidates for Local 3 president totalled 9,517 - an election which required a special trip to the Local 3 hall. cf: Marquart Collection, WRL, Box 3; Local 3 Executive Board Minutes [abbreviated LEB in future], May 20 1937.

22. DMN Strike Bulletin, March 18 1937.

23. ibid, March 12 1937.

> The men in the factory seem to be real Americans, good citizens, some property owners. They want to have real collective bargaining which rightfully belongs to them and guaranteed by the US Government. They want to have fair play with the management; they have Democracy within their Union. They want Democracy within the automobile industry as well as Democracy within the whole country.24

Its demands were legitimate; its aspirations were "American". The movement could be supported by all working Americans, from Communists to Catholics. What had happened between 1933 and 1937 was that the workplace legitimacy of unrestrained managerial autonomy had been undermined. The politics of the New Deal and its kernel of 'responsible citizenship', and the emergence of union organization capable of articulating the new demands of 'worker citizens' accomplished the change - thanks to the healthier climate in parts of the American economy. And at Dodge Main, the longer history of continuous organization, its origins in a Catholic-backed movement and the legitimacy its representatives were accorded as a result of Chrysler's works council scheme all contributed to a higher level of mass involvement in the sitdown than elsewhere.

Independence from the UAW

The Dodge stewards' independence of the UAW headquarters was shown when after the first week Chrysler began to process injunctions against the occupation. The UAW president Homer Martin got cold feet but the Dodge Strike Bulletin still warned:

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24. ibid, March 10 1937.

> There are some people who are going around spreading the propaganda that we can win this strike just as well by leaving the Plants and forming a picket line outside the Plants. Boys, this is Treason. Lets get these rumours stopped, also the stoolies that are spreading it. Our Chief of Police, Patrick Quinn, a former member of the IRA, knows just how to deal with traitors. Get on your toes and let Pat do his stuff.25

After Chrysler got its injunction the pressure to pull out got still stronger. To avoid a confrontation UAW president Martin secured an agreement from Chrysler that it would not attempt to run the plants if the evacuation went ahead, and from Governor Murphy that if necessary he would place state police on the gates to stop strike-breakers. The activists in Local 3 still held out - against the advice of the UAW's Chrysler negotiators - saying they would evacuate only if Chrysler conceded sole bargaining rights and re-opened the plant within seven days.[26] And when they finally left, after several votes at an all-night meeting addressed by Homer Martin,[27] they maintained their active strike sub-committees, including a flying squadron which kept up a picket on the UAW-Chrysler negotiations in the Michigan State capital of Lansing. On April 4 Martin wound up all the Dodge strike committees because "third degree methods were being employed in questioning suspected different people", and their pickets "have by their actions delayed the satisfactory settlement of the

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25. Dodge Strike Bulletin, March 17 1937.

26. ibid, March 17, 19, 22 1937.

27. The paint shop worker Alfred McNeil described Martin as "one of the finest orators that we have ever heard"; DMN, March 22 1952.

present strike".[28] He blamed "the Communists"for the trouble and used it to justify launching an anti-Communist, anti-Socialist factional struggle within the swelling ranks of UAW staff.

The wider layer of Dodge activists, the early tradition of self-reliance, and Dodge Main's unique position as the UAW's largest unionized plant before 1941, added another feature to the form of trade unionism being rooted in Dodge and Chrysler: a degree of independence from the UAW headquarters' staff and from the bureaucratizing process that overtook the UAW as a consequence of its massive growth in 1937. Responsibility and status as a leader of Local 3 were often seen as comparable to (and in Hamtramck often more important than) those of a full-time UAW staff organizer. When Frankensteen, Ross and a few others became staffers, there was still a large experienced cadre of 1933-1935 vintage in the plant. Elsewhere, in smaller plants, and ones with a low proportion of activists, the effect of the massive UAW membership expansion, from 88,000 in February to 400,000 by October 1937, was often the appointment to a UAW staff position of the only really experienced shop floor organizer. For this reason, or because of the sheer volume of new members with no labour organizing traditions, many plants saw the development as early as 1937 of a dependent relationship between their local officers and the UAW machine which was absent at Dodge.

The four-week Chrysler strike ended without a decisive UAW

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28. Dodge Local 3, WRL, Box 4: Stewards' meeting minutes, April 5 1937; Dodge News, April 7 1937.

victory. But management had not cracked the solidarity of the workforce nor, despite certain of its copy-cat GM contract provisions, did it eliminate or de-legitimize shop stewards. So although Chrysler merely conceded bargaining rights to the UAW for its own members in the seven struck Chrysler plants, the managerial defeat had a disproportionate effect, generalizing union consciousness throughout the entire workforce.

The first contracts

The first complete GM contract was signed four days after the Chrysler strike began. It excluded any reference to "shop stewards", and only recognized a new body, the "Shop Committee" of between five and nine (depending on the size of the plant) elected committeemen as the proper channels for grievances. It was, as Harris has recently called it, "a combative, hard-nosed, but fundamentally legal labour relations strategy".[29] One of local GM management's first tasks in the 17 plants where it recognized the UAW was to work out the shape of the new large constituencies with the local UAW leaders.

In the Chrysler agreement, management was as insistent as GM that the word "steward" should be kept out. But it was forced to speak instead of "District Committeemen" and agree that the numbers of Districts should be the same as already in existence.

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29. GM-UAW Agreement, February 11, and Supplemental Agreement, March 12 1937; Harris, op cit, 28.

When the UAW printed out the final agreement of April 14 1937, it overcame the problem of terminology with an insert:

> District Committeemen (**Chief Stewards**) may perform their duties of conferring with foremen or other designated representatives of the plant management, or with the Labor Relations Supervisor of the plant, during working hours without loss of time or pay. A District Committeeman shall always notify his foreman before leaving his work. [my emphasis, SJJ30

The Chrysler agreement contained an anomaly: it provided for two parallel systems of plant bargaining: the existing Chief Stewards retained their rights to time off work, as did their "assistants" on other shifts; and alongside them, in what was assumed to be a superior position in the plant bargaining hierarchy but was not necessarily accepted as such, were the six Committeemen of the Plant (Bargaining) Committee. In reality the situation was even more complex. To counter the rank and file criticism that the "steward system" was being sold out by their negotiators, Richard Frankensteen had to write an introduction to the Agreement which explained the continuing role of Chief Stewards and the continuing function of "regular" sectional (blue or white button) stewards:

> Regular stewards have no authority to deal with the Management but they have official capacity for the Union as contact men during lunch hour, before work and after work, and during this time can pass out grievance slips to those who desire them, collect dues, and serve other interests of the Union...Each District shall have a recognized Chief Shop Steward to present grievances or, in the case of second and third shifts, an Assistant Chief Steward with equal power (to all effects and purposes).31

At Chrysler the "official capacity" of sectional stewards as grievance gatherers and general "contact men" and the status of Chief Stewards were confirmed in the 1937 strike settlement,

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30. Chrysler-UAW Agreement, 6 April, Supplemental Agreement, April 14 1937.

31. ibid, 5.

while at GM the most that could be promised (by Walter Reuther) was that the steward system would be fought for in the next round of negotiations.[32]

Two further significant additions to the GM formal collective bargaining agreements in 1937 and 1938 provide a pointer to the different character of informal plant-level industrial relations at GM and Chrysler, as well as indicating the presence of much more sophisticated planning by GM management. First, in response to a rash of wildcat strikes, UAW president Martin sent a 'management rights' letter to GM confirming the management's right to discipline union activists:

> The Union agrees that it is the responsibility of the Management to maintain discipline and efficiency in its shops and the right of the employer to hire, discipline and discharge employees for cause is expressly recognized, subject to the right of appeal through the grievance procedure.33

Second, the 1938 GM contract not only provided an explicit ratio of "one committeeman for each 400 hourly-rated factory employees working in that plant", but also gave a negative ruling against shop stewards:

> Shop Stewards shall have no function under the grievance procedure and can handle only their own individual grievances with the foreman, same as any other employee.34

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32. Anderson and Jefferys, op cit, Chapter 6.

33. Walter Reuther Collection, WRL, GM Agreements Box. The confidence aroused by the sit-down victory at GM changed the atmosphere throughout the auto industry. Primarily this was because it was the first time that significant numbers had struck a major auto manufacturer and then returned to their jobs afterwards, cf: Anderson and Jefferys, op cit, Chapter 6. I am not arguing that GM workers were unaffected by this new confidence. Indeed, according to GM there were 170 sit-downs in its plants between March and June 1937, Bernstein, op cit, 559. My argument is that in GM this new combativity did not root itself so deeply.

34. 1938 GM Contract, 2.

At the same time GM added to the committeeman's privilege of super seniority provided in the 1937 contract by giving them two hours a day paid by the corporation to pursue grievances.

While most American managements in the 1930s were totally opposed to "outsiders" negotiating wages and conditions for "their" workers, after 1937 GM quite consciously operated a dual policy aimed at limiting the impact of unionism on the shop floor. Inside its plants it undermined the position of departmental and sectional shop stewards to the benefit of its large-constituency committeemen. And at the same time, whenever possible, it negotiated with, made demands on and insisted on the involvement of even more remote figures: the international officers.[35] A quarter-century later Alfred P Sloan, GM's President from 1923 to 1937 and its Chief Executive Officer until 1946, looked back:

> What made the prospect seem especially grim in those early years was the persistent union attempt to invade basic management prerogatives. Our rights to determine production schedules, to set work standards, and to discipline workers were all suddenly called into question.[36]

GM policy was no less hostile to union organization than was Chrysler's, but it was significantly more flexible. It recovered very rapidly from the clear defeat it experienced in the 1937 sit-down strike determined not to allow the initiative to remain with its workers. Industrial relations was prioritized in a way

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35. Harris, op cit, 29.

36. Alfred P Sloan, My years with General Motors (London, Sidgwick and Jackson, 1965), 406.

it had not been before; and while GM finally only abandoned its hope to live entirely without the UAW in 1940, it instantly developed a pragmatic response aimed at forcing the UAW to accept responsibility for wildcat strikes and at maintaining management's rights over the crucial areas of the labour process.

Chrysler, on the other hand, lacked both the foresight, the will and the means to develop a similar sophisticated strategy. As far as it was concerned most militant trade unionists were Communists - beyond the pale. Walter Chrysler told the UAW's top negotiator, the Mineworkers' president, "Mr Lewis, I do not worry about dealing with you, but it is the Communists in these unions that worry me a great deal."[37] The anti-union prejudice and autocratic structure of Chrysler management was not a good combination for dealing with the much more complex job control problems created in its plants by the presence of mass trade unionism.

The contrast between GM and Chrysler was soon shown in the negotiations that followed the 1937 contracts on ending piecework and moving to hourly rates. In GM plants like Fleetwood Fisher Body, these negotiations involved the new plant committees establishing a degree of authority on the pattern of job

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37. Chrysler at the Lansing negotiations in 1937: cited in Bernstein (1969), op cit, 554.

classifications right across the plant. This meant groups of workers who wanted to hold onto their piecework system were overruled by the general wish to get rid of the system's uncertainties.[38]

At Dodge Main, the negotiations were conducted mainly at departmental level and so included a much greater degree of discretion both for local management and for different sections of workers. The result was that although different departments in Dodge allocated job classifications in generally similar payment bands, there was considerable diversity. In certain departments, challenging job classifications and creating new ones soon offered an easier way of getting up-graded than going back to the plant committee. By November 1938, for example, the Dodge Die Room, Department 57, had 12 grades of skilled and high semi-skilled workers, ranging from machine hands starting on 90 cents, and rising in two 5c steps to a maximum of $1 an hour, to die leaders starting on $1.30 rising to $1.40 an hour. In other areas of the plant, like the body-in-white, as Table 7 shows, pay increases could be won by doing marginally more skilled work on jobs with slightly higher job classifications:

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38. Anderson and Jefferys, op cit, Chapter 7.

TABLE 7
WAGES AND LEVELS OF SKILL,
DODGE MAIN BODY IN WHITE, 1938

	Job classification	Hourly rate $
Skill acquired in 3 to 12 months	Die setter	1.10
	Band saw operator	1.10
	Scrap repairman	1.10
	Arc welder	1.10
Skill acquired within a month	Solderer	1.00
	Small straightener	95
	Floor inspectors	95
	Girls	70
Skill acquired within a week	Spot welding	90
	Assembly man	90
	Laboring work	75
	Cleaner	75

SOURCE: List of wages paid at Dodge Main in November 1938; Zaremba, Box 8.

The shift from piecework to hourly payment did not stop all bargaining over money. Rather it transferred that argument from being about the rate of production for a given level of pay to being about the kind of job - and who would get it. In 1937 and 1938 the workplace union was still too weak to initiate bargaining about the work effort; but already, the process of changing payment systems was restraining management from arbitrary decisions on job transfers and promotions.

III. Factional Struggles, 1937-1939

Another element that played an important role in rooting a sectional or problem-solving shop steward tradition deeper inside Chrysler than in GM[39] was the thirty-month factional struggle in the UAW from 1937 to 1939 diagramatically represented in Figure 4 (on the following page).[40] Both at the local and at the

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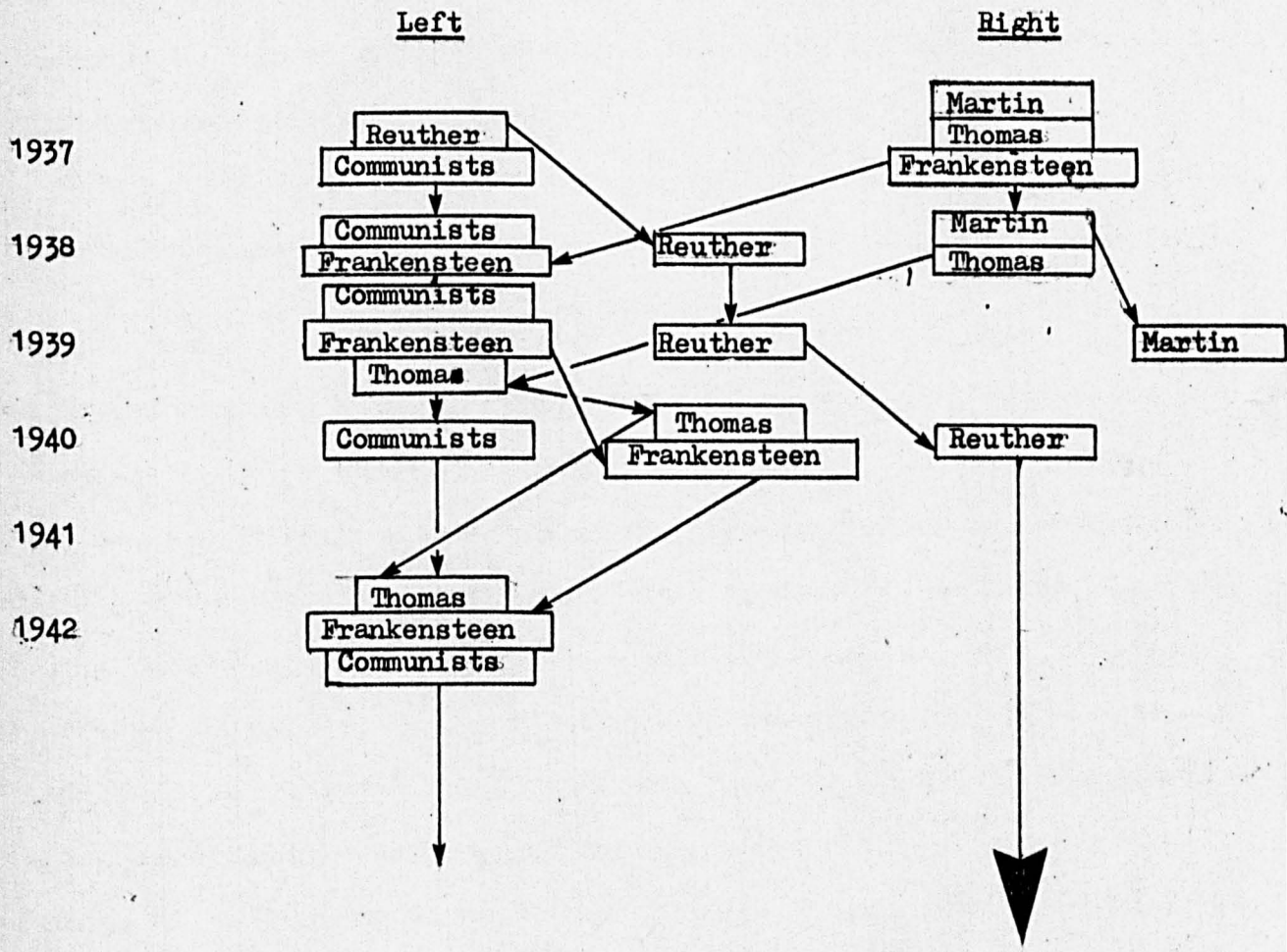
39. Shop stewards, of course, were present in GM plants. Indeed, despite a tendency to overlook their role in the Flint GM sit-down [Keeran, op cit, 168, describes the stewards who attended the meeting which decided to sit-down as merely "unionists"], stewards existed in most GM plants where there were UAW members from 1937 until at least 1946 when GM conceded the dues check-off system. At the Cleveland Fisher Body plant, Bert Foster, a former CP member, interviewed in July 1961 said: "We still have the steward system in our plant although it is not recognized in the national agreement. We still have it and it is functioning. On the national agreement there is a part in there that says a spokesman for the group can speak for the group if it refers to his job. That is the way we worked it in our plant." [Foster, WSU, 15] The physical characteristics of lines of six to 10 presses and a history of both long-established left-wing involvement in the plant and continuous organization from 1933 made Foster aware of how exceptional this was in GM by 1961. And this was the only post-1950 reference to any form of stewards' organization in GM plants I found. My argument here is not that stewards were absent from GM plants from 1937 to 1946-49, but that they were neither structurally located in the GM-UAW bargaining process nor legitimized in GM workers' consciousness over time as a proper way of exercising restraint over management power.

40. This is attempted with Bernstein's warning in mind: "The danger in recounting this episode is that the historian, who is expected to be coherent, will create a state of order that is the product of his imagination rather than of the real world"; [1969] op cit, 555.

UAW Factional Struggle, 1937-1942



international level, the left-wing "Unity Caucus" was broadly identified with the growth of shop steward influence and its consequence, the development of a tradition of 'independent' (from the UAW machine) action. The right-wing "Progressive Caucus", on the other hand, was seen as advocating tight centralization with all decisions on action being taken by the machine. The final decisive defeat of the right-wing Homer Martin faction in 1939 was therefore a major political and ideological boost for do-it-yourself unionism.

Break with Coughlin

The battle between left and right was nowhere more fiercely fought and complex than at Dodge Main. In 1936 the plant was the principal Coughlinite stronghold in Detroit. But the demagogic Coughlin had become increasingly opposed to Roosevelt and the New Deal, and in June 1936 broadcast that the Union Party he had just set up would support congressman William Lemke for President. Roosevelt, Coughlin told a Cleveland meeting in July, was a "betrayer", a "liar" and a "double-crosser". Coughlin promised to deliver nine million votes to Lemke or retire from public life.[41] Coughlin also turned against the UAW when, in August 1936, it joined the fledgling Committee for Industrial Organization just in time to be expelled from the AFL. Coughlin denounced the CIO as

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41. In November 1936 the Union Party only got 892,378 votes for Lemke, and Coughlin carried out his promise of retiring from broadcasting... but only for a short time. Brinkley, op cit, 252-261.

"communistic", [42] and Zaremba recalled:

> All of a sudden, like lightning out of the sky on a clear day (we were visiting Coughlin's home) he said to Dick Frankensteen, 'Say, Dick, you know what?' 'What?' 'I guess I will have to talk against your unions.' 'Why?' 'Because Fisher (Lawrence Fisher of Fisher Body) told me that if I do not speak against you fellows, he is not going to pay the balance for the organ in the church.' And Dick took it jokingly, he thought it was a joke between gentlemen. He said, 'Well, I guess you'll have to talk against us.' Lo and behold, the next Sunday a tirade came from Father Coughlin over WJR radio station against the workers.43

Coughlin's sudden break with his mainly Roosevelt-supporting UAW followers in Dodge Main began a process of disintegration which ultimately led to the isolation of what was still in 1937 the dominant, conservative anti-Communist ruling block.

During the 1937 sit-down the right were able to stop the Daily Worker being allowed through the fence into the plant. Chief Steward Barney Hopkins also read a letter from Department 74 at the Strike Executive Board:

> [we] protest against the Communistic literature passed out to Union men at the plant gates and to the pickets. We demand that something be done to prevent Communism from entering our rank and file. If Communism is to enter our ranks then labour's cause is lost.44

After a considerable debate the Strike EB agreed that the outside pickets should stop "all literature (being) indiscriminately peddled in the street in front of the plant".

By the end of the sit-down strike, discontent with the evacuation from the plant and with the final settlement had swung

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42. ibid, 200.

43. Zaremba, WSU, 15.

44. Zaremba, WRL, Box 9; Strike EB Minutes, March 23 1937.

the balance of forces among Dodge activists to the left. At the first Local 3 membership meeting after the return to work,[45] a call by Dick Frankensteen, the leading right-winger, to delay rushing into a new election was narrowly defeated by 300 to 290 votes by those he called "a click who are trying to get control" But when the 9,517 votes for Local 3 president were counted on May 16 1937, Frankensteen polled 60%, C 'Pat' Quinn, a centre group candidate who had been chief of security in the sit-down, polled 29%, and the left slate candidate who had been Chairman of the Outside Strike Committee, A J Walden (a CP member), polled just 11%. Tony Probe, a former Canadian IWW member and well-known Detroit militant, got 12% of a smaller turnout in another three way split for the position of vice president. This was won by another leading Coughlinite in Dodge, Ed McCann, with 65% of the vote.[46]

Frankensteen and Martin

When UAW President Homer Martin launched his drive to reduce the strong Communist Party and Socialist Party influence in the UAW leadership, local faction organizations, mirroring the national caucuses, sprang up at Dodge. The Unity Caucus including CP member Wyndham Mortimer and SP member Walter Reuther stood for

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45. Local 3 Collection, Box 3; Business Meeting Minutes, April 25 1937.

46. Marquart Collection, WRL, Box 3. Earl Reynolds was the center slate candidate for vice president. The left slate stood for "A solid united local based on REAL DEMOCRACY IN THE UNION".

breaking with the Democratic Party: "We want independent political action... We want to see a Farm-Labour Party in the US based upon our labour movement." And it argued for strong shop stewards' organization:

> We want enlarged powers for the shop stewards. We want them a regular part of the union structure. They should have powers to decide on shop problems, clearly stated in the union constitution.47

By contrast, the Progressive caucus of Homer Martin and the former AIWA leaders Dick Frankensteen and R J Thomas, was silent on these issues. It focused instead upon "responsible" unionism:

> The UAW must at all times protect its right to strike, its greatest weapon. However, we will fight mercilessly against any person responsible for using this weapon irresponsibly or without authorization, in such a way as to place it in jeopardy by giving our opponents the chance to take it away from us.48

The difference about whether shop stewards had the right to "decide on shop problems" or were always obliged to get "authorization" came up often and quite sharply in Dodge, since Martin's "Progressive" view clashed diametrically with the structure and tradition of Dodge unionism and workers' experience of Chrysler management.[49]

The March 1938 Local 3 elections were held in an atmosphere of extreme bitterness, illustrated by these verses about Dodge

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47. Program of the Unity Caucus, Milwaukee Convention, August 1937.

48. Martin-Frankensteen Progressive Caucus for the Preservation of the UAW and the CIO, 1938 Convention.

49. The right-wing controlled Dodge EB warned members against attending "unofficial" meetings, EB Minutes, July 1 1937; and called for the exclusion of sectional shop stewards from stewards' meetings, Steward Body Minutes, May 1 1938. Friedlander suggests Unity was also more concerned with grievances affecting ethnic workers; op cit, 116.

Main's leading right-wingers from a Unity caucus poem circulated round the plant:

> Hitler hides his face in shame
> His methods are so clean
> When compared to the tactics of
> The monster MARTIN-STEEN...
>
> And here's McCann, a sorry specimen
> Without an honest breath
> Besotted - Windy - redbaiting yes man
> As sneaky as a cat
> With all his brains in his pratt...
>
> Brothers meet Mr Frank Szymanski
> That big little pot-bellied boy
> To whom the death of every "Polock"
> Would be everlasting joy...
>
> There they stand, that happy lot
> Of dictators big and small
> By the sword they all have risen
> And by the sword they'll fall... 50

The Progressive (Green) slate was "not endorsed by any Political Party, but... by R T Frankensteen, International Vice President, President of Dodge Local 3". It stood on its AIWA credentials. But it failed to make any headway: against a joint center and left Unity slate, Frank Reid still won the Presidency vacated by Frankensteen with 60% of a turnout nearly a third smaller than the previous year, and Ed McCann held on with 58% as Vice President; but the three other main local positions, Recording Secretary, Financial Secretary and Treasurer (a CP member) were held by the left.[51] In all six "Progressive" slate challengers were defeated. This set-back for the Progressive faction in

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50. Ross Collection, WRL, Box 2.

51. Marquart Collection, WRL, Box 3.

Frankensteen's home local coincided with his growing disillusion with Homer Martin and with approaches by the leaders of the Communist Party's auto work to Frankensteen, promising him various favours and positions if he switched sides and joined the Unity Caucus.[52]

Frankensteen and 'Unity'

The right forces in Dodge, hit hard by Coughlin's desertion, almost lost control of the local executive board when in May 1938 Frankensteen finally switched to the Unity caucus after a deal with the Communist Party that permanently alienated the Reuther brothers who then formed a third camp inside the UAW. In June 1938 Frankensteen found himself one of the five International officers suspended by Martin. On the Dodge EB the right-wing majority slipped; they got only five votes to support Martin's action, and a very modest protest was carried by 12 to 11.[53] By November and December 1938, when the national factional struggle was reaching its height, the paper-thin Progressive majority on the EB and plant committees, tried to lower the status of the chief stewards and reinforce its power. The EB first ruled "that when a Chief Shop Steward has completed his business with the Plant Committee

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52. Keeran, op cit, 196.

53. Zaremba Collection, WRL, Box 1; EB Minutes, June 16 1938. The CP alienated the Reuthers by switching to a Frankensteen protege instead of Victor Reuther for a staff position in the newly formed Michigan CIO in April 1938.

members, he should immediately leave the plant committee room." Then it decided to give the plant committee the monopoly of the use of industrial action and resolved:

> No Chief Shop Steward shall take any action without the knowledge or permission of the Plant Committee of Dodge Local 3. That all Chief Shop Stewards shall receive orders in writing, same orders must possess at least a majority of signatures of Plant Committee members.55

And when this rule was ignored, they threatened to discipline disobedient stewards:

> Any Steward of Dodge Local No. 3 who causes or sanctions any interruption in production without first receiving permission from his officers of his Unit and the Plant Committee, that such a Steward be reprimanded, and shall be held fully responsible for the action taken, to the Executive Board of Dodge Local 3.56

This so clearly laid the stewards open to managerial discipline that a second vote agreed to keep the resolution out of the minutes.

The isolation of the Reid-McCann right-wing Catholic faction was finally completed early in 1939, when R J Thomas, the former AIWA Vice President and President of the Kercheval-Jefferson Chrysler plant, finally deserted Martin, who then suspended 15 members of the International Executive Board and set about building his own UAW. Two months of heavy in-fighting followed; armed guards were put by the Unity caucus supporters on the Local 3 hall; and Financial Secretary Harry Ross refused to countersign

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54. Zaremba Collection, WRL, Box 1, EB Minutes, November 10 1938.

55. ibid, December 5 1938.

56. ibid, December 29 1938. Frank Szymanski, a long-time Coughlinite activist in Dodge seconded this motion.

the check for outstanding international dues McCann wanted to pay over to the Martin headquarters.[57] McCann was found guilty of trying to pack the big Local 3 debate on the Martin versus the IEB issue with black workers who weren't even employed at Dodge.[58]

Defeat of the right

The struggle culminated in elections for Local 3 officers and for delegates to the 1939 UAW-CIO Convention in Cleveland. The right mounted the first major red-baiting campaign seen at Dodge with leaflets attacking Zaremba:

> FACTS
> *Did you know that the Department from which our militant Recording Secretary John A Zaremba comes is the only department in the Dodge Plant that is still unorganized.
> *Did you know that Zaremba claims that he does not belong to the Communist Party.
> *What do you think?
> *Let's judge 'John' by the company he keeps.[59]

In March 1939 the Progressives still inside the UAW-CIO's Dodge Local 3 argued:

> 1. We are not opposed to the CIO.
> 2. We are strongly opposed to wild cat strikes and breaking of our contract. We believe those who are responsible for such acts should be disciplined. BUT we also believe being very firm in insisting that the Corporation lives up to its side of the contract.[60]

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57. Harry Ross, WSU, 26.

58. Zaremba Collection, Box 1; Dodge EB Minutes, February-March 1938.

59. Ross Collection, Box 3; Leaflet dated January 10 1939. This was the first of many election campaigns at Dodge Main in which anti-communism was the principle campaigning issue for at least one slate. It was also the only one of such elections where the red-baiting appeared not to strike a chord in the wider plant consciousness.

But this "More Unionism, less Communism" slate suffered a total defeat. Reid was the only Progressive elected to the Cleveland Convention out of 20 delegates. And the "CIO slate" pushing Quinn for President and Zaremba for re-election as Recording Secretary, complete with photograph of John L Lewis, swept the election of local officers and plant committee members. "The CIO is Americanism" slogan won the day.

In March 1939 the split by Martin resulted in the formation of two UAW organizations, one affiliated to the CIO, the other to the AFL. This encouraged GM and Chrysler to try to recover the managerial control they had lost in 1937. 'Buck' Jones in the Pressed Steel unit, Department 74, wrote a UAW-CIO "Reconstruction Song":

> Hold the fort for we will help you,
> UAW is strong,
> Frankensteen is one who will do it,
> Now that Martin's gone. 61

The UAW-AFL was not seen as 'legitimate' in Dodge because while it was led by the old Coughlinites, it opposed the plant tradition of on-the-job problem solving. It failed to attract any significant

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60. Marquart Collection, WRL, Box 3. The leaflet, supporting Reid for President and Szymanski for Sergeant-at-Arms came out after McCann's defection to the UAW-AFL and had his name for Vice President crossed out and Joe Mehilic substituted. It presented the slate as representing the true tradition of Dodge trade unionists: "Each of these candidates was an active member of the old AIWA and has continued to be active in the UAWA. These men are proven Union Builders."

61. 'Buck' Jones' songs in Harry Ross Collection, WRL, Box 3.

group of activists. Even Frank Reid kept a foot in both camps, staying in the UAW-CIO and reporting to the Dodge Executive Board on AFL meetings.[62] The breakaway union finally collapsed in Dodge after the overwhelming 85% vote for the UAW-CIO in a Labor Board election on September 27 1939[63]. Over the next six months all bar a handful made their peace and were readmitted to Local 3.

The effect of this center-left victory on shop steward organization in Chrysler plants, formerly a bastion of right-wing power in the union, was considerable. The anti-steward rulings of the Reid-McCann period were turned over in September in a new Local 3 constitution which reflected the more rank and filist tone of the 1939 UAW-CIO convention[64] and of another 'Buck' Jones offering:

> Oh Frankensteen, Oh Frankensteen,
> We will vote for you but keep your nose clean,
> We'll go to the front for you,
> And you must be good and true,
> We don't want one man rule in the U.A.Wuoo. 65

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62. EB minutes, November 10 1939. September 9 1939: one of the stewards criticized for "indifference" about the spread of Homer Martin buttons in Department 76 in February, was Barney Hopkins, who also performed at other times a similar role as 'honest broker'.

63. Out of 20,583 votes cast (22,000 eligible), 17,654 went to the UAW-CIO and just 837 went to the UAW-AFL. Across all 13 Chrysler plants where the Labor Board balloted there was an 80% majority for the UAW-CIO, with 40,564 voting CIO and 4,673 voting AFL and 4,476 voting neither out of 54,000 eligible voters: United Auto Worker: Dodge Local 3 Edition, October 4 1939.

64. One participant wrote later: "When, clause by clause, the new constitution emerged from the convention mill, the authority of the president had been pruned, the powers of the exectuive board augmented, the yearly convention brought back, the rights of locals increased, and control over collective bargaining protected through a structure of intracorporation councils of delegates from the plants. The UAW came out of the Cleveland convention the most democratic union in the country." Bert Cochran, Labor and Communism: the Conflict that shaped American unions, (Princeton: Univesity Press, 1977), 143.

The new constitution restored the primacy of the steward over the plant committee in his or her own department, stating: "The Plant Bargaining Committee shall not invade the jurisdiction of a Chief Steward, except at his or her invitation, or at the discretion of the Executive Board."[66] It built into the rules rank and file control over chief stewards' freedom of action, laying down that "The Chief Shop Steward cannot settle a grievance unless it meets with the approval of a majority of the union men affected." It also explicitly pushed the sectional shop stewards:

> The Chief Shop Steward may appoint or elect, if the group wishes, as many deputy stewards as may be necessary to aid in his or her duties. There shall be at least one deputy steward for a group of 20 or less. In case of isolated groups there must be a deputy steward in the group...It shall be the duty of the deputy stewards to attend all steward, unit and special meetings.[67]

The constitutional advance of sectional bargaining helped create the conditions for a major contest over workplace legitimacy in October and November 1939.

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65. Ross Collection, WRL, Box 3.

66. United Auto Worker, Dodge Local 3 Edition, October 10 1939.

67. ibid; June 7 1939, reported the decisions by the Dodge steward body that no member of Local 3 should contact management without a chief steward present and that any steward who didn't report dues collected within a 30 day period would have his button taken away.

CHAPTER 7

EQUAL CONTROL OF PRODUCTION

1939-1941

The ground chosen by Chrysler for a major confrontation in 1939 was its power unilaterally to determine production standards. The strike outcome, however, was a nearly unqualified victory for the workers. In contrast with the UAW victory over GM in the summer's "strategy strike"[1], Chrysler management learned nothing from its defeat. Its labour relations function remained an adjunct of its New York-based attorney, far removed from workplace realities. The strike established the custom and practice of mutuality so firmly in the determination of standards at Chrysler that it would finally be up-rooted only in the industrial relations hiatus of the late 1950s.

At GM, the 1939 defeat caused management to re-organize its structure so that labour relations became a top responsibility, with a strong central staff allocated to negotiate and administer contracts with the UAW. GM was able to adapt because, as Harris

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1. So-called because of the strategy decided upon by Mortimer, John Anderson (the former MESA member) and Reuther of striking GM's skilled workers during the period when the production workers were laid off and GM was preparing for the 1940 models; Anderson and Jefferys, op cit, Chapter 7.

describes, it had "an ingrained habit of 'management by policy' - the development of a program of concerted action - to handle all important problems"[2] and could review mistakes in a way not possible in autocratically-managed companies. GM had massive power resources and could access them comparatively easily.

Section one of Chapter 7 traces the history of the decisive 1939 strike that tilted the balance of forces on the shop floor at Chrysler in the workers' favour. Section two examines the consolidation of a tradition of mutuality in sectional bargaining in 1940 and 1941, despite the onset of anti-Communism.

I. 1939 Chrysler strike

Anticipating the market recovery of 1940-1941 Chrysler management seized the opportunity provided by the union split. But once again it underestimated the hold union organization had taken - even among the plant's pre-union 'old-timers', those hired before 1935. Management refused to extend the contract after March 1939 for more than a month at a time on the grounds that it didn't know which UAW it was really dealing with. In May, at the end of the 1939 model run, it fired leading leftist 'Pat' Patrick, the plant committee chairman, for allegedly intimidating a

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2. Harris, op cit, 29.

foreman.[3] Then, in September 1939 after calling the 1932 to 1934 men back to work for the 1940 models, it announced that it would not renew the contract and introduced a major speed-up aimed at strengthening its control of production standards.

The Michigan State Unemployment Compensation Commission[4] described the speed-up at Dodge Main as particularly harsh for the day and night shifts in three departments: the body-in-white (3,000 workers), the paint shop (1,800 workers) and the crankshaft department (150 workers). During the 1939 model year the body building's arc and gas welding lines had worked at 12 bodies per hour; the management now set a new rate of 20 and on October 6 1939 fired 20 men for not fulfilling their production target. That day the paint shop superintendent fired workers on the body spray line, where the speed was raised from 46.5 to 48 an hour, on the wet sand line, where the 24 men had been sanding 27 an hour and were told to do 36, and some enamel sprayers who refused to spray eight more cars an hour than the 30 they claimed was their maximum. In the crankshaft department the line speed was the same as for the previous year's model, but the crankshaft weighed

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3. United Auto Worker, Dodge Local 3 Edition, June 7 1939: the foreman involved was in transmission unit, department 107.

4. Zaremba Collection, WRL, Box 8; 1939 Unemployment Compensation Commission Report, November 3 1939 into the eligibility of Dodge workers to claim unemployment insurance on the basis that they were locked out. This report concluded in the workers' favour; but when Chrysler appealed this decision to the Referee on August 6 1940,he ruled that a labour dispute had taken place so the Dodge workers were not qualified to receive unemployment compensation.

90lbs, 3.5lbs more than the 1939 model year crankshaft, and so management fired some workers for handling three or four less an hour. It sent the rest of the workers in all these areas home.

For the next two weeks the same thing happened every day in one area or another of the plant. Men would come to work, be instructed to work at the speed dictated by management, be told they had no right either to bargain about it or to put it into the grievance procedure because there was no contract in effect after September 30, and then the foremen would fire a handful of workers. In axle unit 113, the supervision fired four assistant chief stewards, two chief stewards and two deputy stewards between October 6 and October 10. By the end of the second week Chrysler had fired a total of 105 and disciplined another 23 Dodge workers, and the UAW-CIO's Executive Board (IEB), now led by former Chrysler workers R J Thomas and Dick Frankensteen, finally decided to take a Chrysler-wide strike vote. IEB politics meant Dodge Main was not allowed to be isolated.

Struggle for control

The strike vote was held on October 15. In later years strike votes became used as bargaining ploys and were often poorly attended. But this vote was massive: 13,751 Dodge workers for strike action with 1,324 against - a 90% majority. They were defending the new frontier of restraints from managerial infringements. The top two strike demands were about workers' living standards and control of the labour process:

1. A general wage increase with a bonus for afternoon and night shift workers.
2. Joint fixing of production standards by the corporation and the union.5

Management didn't duck the issue either. General Manager Herman Weckler replied: "Production schedules are the management's function. You may as well know now that we do not intend to give your union control of production."[6] The strike began on October 18 1939 and lasted 45 days. Father Coughlin, whose self-imposed silence in November 1936 lasted just six weeks and whose broadcasts were now strongly anti-semitic,[7] entered the ring with a blistering radio denounciation of the strike. His broadcast included a speech by David Brann, the leading UAW-AFL man at Dodge, who stated that "shop stewards actually placed locks on the conveyor to limit production."[8] Coughlin was outraged:

> Among the demands which the union are making through their leaders, they are asking for an equal control of production standards and a total control of discipline over all workmen in the Chrysler Corporation.9

Coughlin, of course, is not a source of fact on this or any other matter. But although his influence by 1939 was negligible compared with five years earlier, his broadcasts were still listened to by enough Chrysler workers to prompt an urgent discussion on Local

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5. UAW, Dodge Local 3 Edition, October 18 1939.

6. ibid, October 25 1939.

7. Brinkley, op cit, 265-6.

8. Zaremba Collection, WRL, Box 1; Dodge LEB minutes, November 12 1939. McCann's suggestion of such a high level of job control was treated as a total distortion both of the reality and of what the strikers were demanding on the Local Executive Board.

9. Charles E Coughlin, The Chrysler CIO Industrial Strike, (Detroit: pamphlet, November 12 1939); in Ross Collection, WRL, Box 3.

3's Executive Board.[10]

Chrysler's determination to defeat the strike finally led it to the next step in the strike-breaking Mohawk Valley formula:[11] a desperate attempt at creating a back-to-work movement among some of the 1,700 black workers employed in the Dodge foundry and in low paid janitorial jobs. It was assisted by Homer Martin's UAW-AFL, which had proved its capacity at mobilizing small numbers of blacks earlier in the year. After some rioting on Friday November 24 between pickets and blacks trying to enter the plant to collect their paychecks, several prominent black politicians and organizations moved into action to prevent the movement growing. One pro-strike leaflet asked,

> How long will the Negro stand for Labor Dictation?
> What is happening is obviously on the part of the Corporation to get the Negroes to go into the plant to antagonize the white workers.[12]

On Monday 27 November, Chrysler and the UAW-AFL organized a group of 181 blacks, six whites and a 1,000-strong police escort to march through a mass picket of more than 5,000 workers carrying American flags. The following day the number of black strike-

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10. Coughlin's following in Detroit remained considerable until America entered World War II, when he was disciplined by the Catholic hierarchy who saw his pro-Hitler remarks as an embarrassment; Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, Detroit: I do mind dying - A study in urban revolution (New York: St Martin's Press, 1975), 186.

11. The nine point formula for breaking strikes and destroying the union used at Remington Rand in May 1936 and subsequently promoted by the National Association of Manufacturers and the American Iron and Steel Institute. See Bernstein (1969), op cit, 478-9.

12. Leaflet issued by the black organization, the National Association of American Workers, reported to the Dodge LEB, Minutes, November 24 1939.

breakers rose to 430. But this was not enough. Chrysler had neither recruited sufficient black strike-breakers to come even remotely close to a mass back-to-work movement that could mobilize white workers as well, nor had it provoked the white workers into anti-black rioting. Under mounting criticism from fellow employers and from Detroit and national politicians, Chrysler surrendered the next day.

Strike gains

The 1939 strike established the formal recognition by management of the union's steward system and institutionalized sectional collective-bargaining tradition at the start of a two-year boom in car production. The November 29 1939 contract was crucial in cementing a job bargaining tradition into the Chrysler workers' view of workplace legitimacy because it came as a struggled-for advance.

Chrysler was forced to recognize formally chief stewards and assistant chief stewards. These were given super seniority, as were members of the plant committee and local executive board, and won the right to move about their areas virtually at will:

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13. Zaremba Collection, WRL, Box 6; Chrysler Corporation-UAW Agreement, November 29 1939. A detailed account of the back-to-work movement is given in A.Meier and E Rudwick, Black Detroit and the rise of the UAW, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 67-71.

> Chief Stewards and assistant Chief Stewards, during their working hours, without loss of time or pay, may...perform their duties of conferring with foremen or other designated representatives of the plant management and of investigating grievances.14

The same agreement allowed the chief stewards to leave work to confer with other chief stewards or to telephone the plant committee. Shop floor trade unionism at Chrysler had thus been formally accepted by the management in a form that encouraged on-the-spot bargaining between a small-constituency, elected workers' representative and the immediate supervisor. It was a form much more liable to encourage wheeling and dealing and a shop floor tradition of custom and practice, accepted by both workers and supervisors, than was the much more remote individual-to-plant committee structure at GM.

The settlement on production standards was more ambiguous than the legitimation of chief and assistant stewards. But it still provided a new and formal basis for the blossoming of restraints on management in on-the-job bargaining. Section 3 (1) of the contract referred to the rate of production being established "on the basis of fairness and equity" for "the reasonable working capacities of normal operators". Section 3 (2) gave the foreman the power to "adjust the matter" if the workers (or their blue button steward) complained the rate was too fast. And, if the foreman refused, it allowed for negotiations to take place between the chief steward and general foreman or

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14. LEB Minutes, November 27, 29 1939.

superintendent at department level. Only then, "should a satisfactory agreement not result, the matter in dispute shall be referred to the bargaining procedure" - that is, it would go to the plant committee. Finally, "The management of each plant is authorized to settle such matters."[15] Discretion was formally placed in the hands of lower level management - a group without any training in labour relations.

The UAW, understandably, exaggerated its achievement. Workers had got their first all-round general wage rise since 1937 (although rates tended to be less than at GM), and all 128 workers fired and disciplined in October were reinstated. The UAW-Dodge Main News boasted:

> The workers are now allowed a say in the setting of production rates, one of the main issues in the dispute. Sole bargaining rights are granted, squeezing out the rump and other company unions. Seniority is retained no matter how long the worker is laid off. The 'no strike' clause is eliminated.16

More important than the form of words was the confidence Chrysler's defeat inspired in the shop floor union tradition. This now consolidated itself at Dodge Main, at the Plymouth and Jefferson (Kercheval) car plants and at the Dodge Truck plant.

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15. Chrysler-UAW Contract, November 29 1939, 14-15.

16. DMN, December 6 1939.

II. Consolidation, 1940-1941

Frank Marquart, education director of Local 3 from 1937 to 1941, later recalled an incident in the body-in-white that was common in 1940. The superintendent instructed the welders to raise their production; Art Shipley, their chief steward, suggested they continue working normally and so one welder was laid off. Shipley then called all the workers together to march down to the superintendent's office where, faced with a boom in orders, the superintendent called the man back to work.[17] Little wonder, then, that a new hire into the body shop in October 1940 was highly impressed because "the foremen were very nervous about giving orders to the workers".[18]

The considerable extent of shop floor restraints on managerial authority in 1940 and 1941 did not mean that unattached militants or Communist Party members 'controlled' Local 3. The union tradition established at Dodge clearly owed much to "the left",

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17. Marquart, WSU, 22-23. There is no way of knowing whether this incident was reported by the superintendent as a work stoppage. If the Dodge General Manager knew about it, it probably was. But if he didn't, the superintendent may well have kept quiet. The incident illustrates the problem of using strike statistics as an indicator of the true level of conflict, particularly in the early years of the UAW's existence before Chrysler created a specialist labour relations function. Chrysler later claimed there were 200 contract violations including 130 strikes in its plants between March 1937 and November 1939; 100 violations between December 1939 and December 1941; and 98 violations between January 1942 and May 1943: Chrysler Corporation, Beyond the Facts and the Records, (Detroit: 1943), 7-8.

18. Interview by author with Ed Liska, August 11 1982.

its CP and SP members, IWW supporters, and hundreds of assorted socialist and socialist-influenced militants who articulated democratic aspirations in class terms.[19] But they were always a small minority, and usually did not even hold more than one or two key local offices. The sectional bargaining tradition the left helped create became identified as a kind of democratic 'right' by all Dodge workers. Before long it had become institutionalized. Unlike GM after the war where the defeat of the left and of the shop steward tradition were linked, at Dodge Main the defeat of the left did not recast workers' views of trade unionism.

The disintegration and dual unionism of the Dodge Catholic-right early in 1939 was the dynamic that gave Dodge CP members and their closest followers a temporary ascendancy - but even this was conditional upon Frankensteen's relationship with the CP at international union level and a pact with the center forces in Dodge itself. Neither of these conditions survived the next two years. From mid-1939, the Quinn-Zaremba center-left coalition was pressured by the new Thomas-Frankensteen UAW leadership to assume the mantle of "responsible" unionism. In January 1940 the local endorsed the IEB's latest pronouncement against unauthorized strikes.[20] This gesture was partly a public rejection of the new

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19. In the 1960s another "outside" influence, the rise of black politics, also helped shape "inside" consciousness and organization, see Part Four below.

20. DMN, January 24 1940.

CP line that followed the August 1939 Russo-German Non-Aggression Pact. And partly it flowed from the definition of the incumbent officers' role in the plant as 'servants of the contract'.

By March 1940 the left-center coalition had broken down entirely and a new 'Left Platform' was formed to fight the Quinn-Zaremba center in the Local elections. The left, CP members and its close supporters, asked Dodge workers, "Will you put up a fight to remove the conniving hot-air politicians while you have some democracy left?"[21] But Recording Secretary Zaremba beat his left opponent by a two to one margin and 'Pat' Patrick, the left candidate against President Quinn, got beaten narrowly into third place with 18% by the Progressive candidate, who got 21%. On top of this the incumbent 'left' vice president was defeated three to two by the Progressive (right-wing) candidate.[22]

Twelve months later the political atmosphere in Dodge (and elsewhere) had shifted further to the right as a result of both the CP's self-isolationism and the launching of a consistent red-baiting campaign by the Reuther faction in the UAW.[23] This

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21. Election pamphlet in Ross Collection, WRL, Box 3.

22. Election results in Ross Collection, WRL, Box 3.

23. Keeran, op cit, 105-112.

further weakened the already weak CP in Dodge Main, and so it didn't run its own slate again. Quinn was re-elected Local 3 President with 76% support against the former Martin supporter, Frank Reid; Zaremba secured 59% of the poll against another Progressive; but the CP incumbent treasurer was defeated 2,159 votes to 2,140 by the long-standing right-winger Barney Hopkins.[24]

The increasing strength of anti-Communism in Dodge was illustrated by the debate around Reuther's constitutional amendment to the 1941 UAW Buffalo Convention. This would bar Communists and Fascists from holding international office. When it came up at the Dodge membership meeting, the CP's 'clever' amendment to make the ban appear ridiculous by widening it to include "Socialists and ACTU members" was defeated. The meeting voted instead to hold a Dodge Main referendum on Reuther's proposal. This took place in July, and showed 3,864 in favour of banning "Communists, Fascists and Nazis" from international office and just 1,457 against.[25] The following month the Local 3 delegation split at the Buffalo Convention 27 to 10 in favour, mirroring the two-thirds majority the rule change got on the Convention floor. The right versus left split in the Dodge Main delegation on the other key vote, the seating of the Allis-

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24. DMN, March 1 1941.

25. Ross Collection, WRL, Box 3.

Chalmers delegates, was virtually the same.[26] The dominance of the right wing was re-established at Dodge Main in 1940 and 1941 on the basis of "outside" anti-Communist politics and factional organization. It was to last for the rest of the decade.

Dodge Main had its militants: stewards like Art Shipley and Albert Fanti. Shipley unsuccessfully opposed workers wearing Chrysler ID badge numbers, arguing: "I cannot see anything the Union has to gain by wearing the badge numbers on the outside, but it does simplify the job for the stool pigeons."[27] And Fanti tried to democratize the steward system further, aware of the dangers arising from a Chief Steward's privileges. He moved a resolution unsuccessfully on the stewards' council:

> That all blue button stewards be elected...That all districts having a chief steward, shall have a Stewards' Council (to meet weekly), consisting of elected Blue Button stewards and the Chief Steward.[28]

But while several Dodge workers had fairly developed rank and file strategies, and while they helped create and root the sectional union organization that developed, they were not its principal

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26. DMN, October 1 1941. Prominent CP members headed up the Allis-Chalmers delegation from a plant that had just been involved in a controversial defense industry strike.

27. DMN, March 15 1941. Shipley and Fanti were both stewards in Department 76, body-in-white.F

28. Dodge Local 3 Collection, Box 3; Stewards Council minutes, February 8 1941. Fanti's notes are contained in the minutes: "1. Difference of opinions between Chief Steward and member - no appeal from Steward's decision - except by Special meeting. he can refuse to call Plant Committee. 2. More democratic. Better chance of getting grievances settled. 3. Indifferent Chief Stewards will be reported. 4. The Blue Button Stewards as they are now have not any responsibility. We must give them a special responsibility and then we can hold any responsible for their work."

source of strength. Even at management's weakest point in 1940, when its unilateral control was most restricted and when socialism, communism or just anti-capitalism, were supported by several hundred individual Dodge workers, this anti-capitalist politics never became a part of collective workplace consciousness. The legitimacy and durability of sectional unionism derived, in a political atmosphere supportive of democratic-individualism, from the interaction of management's de facto recognition with workers' experience of the system working for them in conflicts.

By 1940-41 Chrysler management had seen restraints imposed over its autonomy to determine both labour costs (wage rates, hours of work) and important aspects of the labour process (speed and allocation of work, discipline). In its plants a qualitative movement of the frontier of control, the exercise of collective restraint by workers over managerial power and authority on the shop floor, had taken place in the workers' favour. By contrast, GM's Alfred P Sloan reminisced some 20 years later in a way unthinkable for a Chrysler executive:

> So far as our operations are concerned, we have moved to codify certain practices, to discuss workers' grievances with union representatives, and to submit for arbitration the few grievances that remain unsettled. But on the whole, we have retained all the basic powers to manage.29

Despite the similar technology, product, marketing and casual

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29. Sloan, loc cit.

labour market conditions faced by GM and Chrysler before the Second World War, the difference in union organization, management structure and workplace labour relations was already considerable. Part 3 explains why this union organization interacted with managment in alternating boom and slump market conditions to give Chrysler a consistently higher strike frequency after 1940 than GM.

PART THREE

OVERCOMING RESISTANCE

1942-1959

CHAPTER 8

LABOUR IN WAR AND PEACE

Chapter 8 first traces the broad development of the American labour movement through the 1940s and 1950s, and then considers some of the debates raised by the Chrysler evidence.

I. Overview

Writing in 1940, a Harvard professor of government, Arthur N Holcombe, argued that class conflict in the United States was beginning to replace geographical sectionalism:

> Class-consciousness waxes as sectionalism wanes among the underlying forces in American politics, and the struggle of classes in some form threatens to become as important in the years ahead as the intersectional struggles in the years behind.1

Ten years later, as David Brody has pointed out, many would have endorsed the view that American labour had "firmly entrenched itself in law, industry and political life".[2] The unionization

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1. Arthur N Holcombe, The middle classes in America, (1940), cited in Marwick, op cit, 53.

2. Arthur M Schlesinger, Washington Post, January 1 1950, cited in Brody, op cit, 173. Brody cites Schlesinger as an authority testifying to the reality of labour's post-war power. The argument here is that while organized labour was clearly present post-war in management policy calculations in a way it hadn't been before 1935, this alone did not constitute 'power'. It is necessary to show how labour's presence obliged management across most of industry to limit the shop floor expression of its own interests, as happened at Dodge Main but not in GM plants, before the wider view of a 1946-50 peak of union power can be accepted.

that had tentatively embraced semi- and unskilled workers in America's major manufacturing industries in the late 1930s had survived as a force to be reckoned with. But this was not the dominance of class consciousness and struggle as Holcombe had predicted - and the left had hoped for. The business unionism that characterized AFL and CIO union leaders in the 1950s was different from the anti-employer ideology of CIO organizers in the 1930s; while anti-Communism and political conformity played the shaping roles taken in the 1930s by radical dissent. It was neither unqualified power nor class struggle that other observers detected after the war, but the emergence of union leaders as "the managers of discontent". Mills wrote in 1948 that "even as the labour leader rebels, he holds back rebellion. He organizes discontent and then he sits on it, exploiting it in order to maintain a continuous organization".[3] Yet the view of the war and post-war period as one of labour-management accommodation is also misleading, for it was full of contradictions. In the eyes of most employers, labour became a "power in the land" during World War II.[4] But it remained a limited form of power, increasingly legitimated by the very employers against whom it was supposed to be exercised. And while the labour leaders reached agreements with corporate labour relations departments, an intense shop floor

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3. C Wright Mills, The New Men of Power: America's Labor Leaders (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1948), 8-9.

4. The president of the US Chamber of Commerce said in 1944: "Measured in numbers, political influence, economic weight, or by any other yardstick, labour is a power in our land." Cited in Brody, op cit, 174.

struggle over effort and work discipline continued.

Equally contradictory, poverty remained widespread despite massive economic growth. And political freedoms continued to be denied blacks in the southern states while America trumpeted itself internationally as the defender of the "free world". The considerable growth in union membership and in status and personal power of union leaders between 1942 and 1960 was not reflected in any major shift in income distribution and in certain ways was associated with more rather than fewer restrictions on civil liberties.

In America's first full year of war, 1942, the National Bureau of Economic Research recorded 9.8 million union members; by 1945 this figure reached 12 million and by 1950, 14 million. Ten years later it stood at 15.5 million. Union density as a percentage of the number of employed and unemployed civilians in the workforce over these same years rose from 22.3% in 1942 to 28.9% in 1945, and stayed in the range 28.3% to 31.6% until 1958 when it began a long-term decline.[5] After 1957-59 the increase in total union membership was outstripped by the expansion of the labour supply. Strike frequency in the 1940s and 1950s also responded differently to the 1930s and failed to mirror the

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5. Bain and Price, loc cit.

absolute growth in union numbers. Excluding the strike-prone coal industry, the annual average fell from 105 strikes per million non-agricultural workers between 1937 and 1941 to 80 from 1945 to 1959.[6] The more union members, it appeared, the less frequent the number of strikes noted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Union organization, however, did make its mark. Once established in the mass production industries, it encouraged more strikes than in the years before its consolidation: between 1946 and 1959 reported strikes outside the coal industry still occurred 27% more frequently than from 1931 to 1936. And, industrial unionism changed the shape of these strikes. Strikes were either bigger or lasted longer than in the 1930s or during the war. Open conflict on the shop floor, characterized by large numbers of short, sharp strikes, was less than in the late 1930s, but there were more set-piece confrontations involving whole plants or companies.[7] This change resulted from greater and more effective federal intervention, more sophisticated management and

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6. Edwards P K [1981], op cit, 254.

7. P K Edwards, "The exceptionalism of the American Labour Movement: the neglected role of workplace struggle", SSRC Industrial Relations Research Unit paper (Coventry: University of Warwick, February 1983), Table 2, 7. The loss ratio of days lost per thousand workers excluding coal was averaged 428 from 1937 to 1941, 289 from 1942 to 1945, 1070 between 1946 and 1949, and 658 from 1950 to 1959.

greater centralization and less democracy in the CIO unions. Yet while open conflict tended to be channelled more within an institutional framework, it could not be suppressed and often was not effectively 'managed'.

Government regulation of labour relations was greatly accelerated in the period of war preparations and during the first two years of America's direct involvement in World War II. In 1940 Roosevelt appointed major US business leaders and the influential CIO unionist, Sidney Hillman, to key positions in the National Defense Advisory Committee and its successor, the Office of Production Management, to coordinate the industrial defense program.[8] In March 1941, Roosevelt established a National Defense Mediation Board to which he appointed Philip Murray, president of the CIO, George Meany, secretary-treasurer of the AFL, and certain pro-New Deal industrialists like the chairman of Standard Oil and US Rubber's director of industrial and public relations. Within three months, the Board announced that it would not arbitrate in disputes in the event of a strike.[9]

After the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and America into the

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8. GM president William Knudsen and US Steel chairman Edward R Stettiniuswere the most prominent industrialists appointed to head production planning and industrial materials respectively; Hillman was president of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America; Lichtenstein [1982], op cit, 38-41.

9. ibid, 51-53.

war in December 1941, the CIO gave Roosevelt a no-strike pledge. The Mediation Board, now reborn as the more powerful National War Labor Board (NWLB), could now include union security clauses in contracts so that workers who did not opt out of the union within their first 15 days on the job would be bound to pay dues, usually under a checkoff agreement, and abide by union rules. A standard formula to this effect was launched in June 1942. Conceived not as a means of strengthening shop floor unionism, but as a device to strengthen the finances and authority of the senior union officials, it was followed a month later by an NWLB ruling that the Little Steel wage award formula, limiting increases to 3.5% in 1942 while inflation was running at 15%, would be a maximum.

The No Strike Pledge, union security and what amounted to a wage freeze, provided the context for the substantial but contradictory war-time union growth. In return the union leaders institutionalized close collaboration with the government and the employers. The active backing of the CIO for the wartime mediation boards and the no-strike pledge proved crucial in establishing a uniform pattern of industrial relations - industry-wide wage agreements, grievance procedures and impartial arbitration, and strongly-centralized unions pledged not to sanction strikes during the term of a contract.[10]

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10. ibid, 51, 72-81. Ford and Chrysler joined GM in securing a 'no strike' security clause in their contracts in 1946 after the national No Strike Pledge had lapsed.

Unlike the struggled-for unionization of the early and mid-1930s, workers joined up more by default than by positive commitment during World War II. This is not to suggest the new factory workers were necessarily less conscious of their rights and interests against management; the presence of a core of pre-war militants ensured that the tradition would get passed on in the older industrial centres.[11] And once introduced to a tradition that denied management the right to act arbitrarily, the new wartime labour force took over the pre-war frontier of control as if it were its own creation. But the lack of conscious collective effort involved in establishing this new 'strength' encouraged a passive reliance on the existing union structure, while the draft took most of the earlier generation of union builders into the armed services. The centralized, bureaucratic 'bossdom' these developments encouraged became characteristic of virtually all the industrial unions in the second-half of the 1940s.

During the war, when labour's leaders were prepared to accept wage restraint and to police their 'no strike pledge', the employers had been persuaded - mainly by the government - to legitimize the union presence in their plants. After V-J Day managements found they still had to suffer union legitimacy but without the quid pro quo. They therefore resisted bitterly what

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11. ibid, 126.

were usually quite moderate catching-up demands made by union leaders anxious to renew their base among the rank and file after four years of opposing strikes. A great strike wave swept America: in the year following the surrender of Japan over five million workers struck to retain wartime job conditions and restore earnings levels seriously eroded during 1945.[12] Managerial hostility, both to the extension of industry-wide bargaining to planning and non-wage conditions, and to the continuation of the wartime frontier of control, guaranteed strikes were big and long through the rest of the 1940s. The number of days lost in reported strikes between 1946 and 1949 averaged 15,000 per strike as against under 4,000 per strike between 1942 and 1945 and around 7,000 days per strike between 1950 and 1957.[13] And, critically for the politics of post-war America, these major confrontations remained isolated from each other. After more workers experienced strike action, in most instances without strike pay and for longer periods, than in any other period of labour relations history, the unions secured some restoration of their members' real earnings. But they couldn't move the employers on any of the other wider issues of consultation and control, and were forced to include 'company security' clauses in their contracts that made permanent

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12. Preis, op cit, 279; Edwards P K [1981], op cit, 173; Lichtenstein [1982] op cit, 113.

13. Edwards P K [1981], op cit, 254.

the wartime no strike pledge for the term of the contract.[14] The mass production industry unions survived this aspect of the employers' offensive; but the bitterness of the contest gave a boost to the fortunes of more conservative officials who openly advocated compromise and survival. The considerable shop floor confidence of the war years ended dramatically in a highly-fragmented strike wave that failed to draw in the non-union majority of workers. This outcome, with a dominant wartime ideology of nationalism, created a basis for widespread political apathy and popular support for anti-Communism.[15]

Entrenched employer resistance to post-war unionism was also reflected in new legal restrictions on the unions. The right-ward electoral shift since 1938[16] became a landslide. The liberalism of the New Deal had come to a halt in 1939 when Wagner's health insurance scheme failed in Congress; in June 1941, when strikes

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14. Preis, op cit, 281, is clearly wrong to refer to the 18 1/2 cents agreed at GM after a three months strike as "a proud victory". Anderson and Jefferys, op cit, , suggest the failure to win more than Chrysler and Ford where the same settlement was reached without strike action had a demoralizing effect among shop floor workers.

15. Mike Davis, "The Barren Marriage of American Labour and the Democratic Party", New Left Review, 124 (Nov-Dec 1980), 74, is right to point out the significance of "the rise of wartime nationalism" on the subsequent course of labour history. But he oversteps the evidence in arguing that this "ultimately created the basis for a new cultural cohesion within the postwar American working-class". Not only is that "cultural cohesion" problematic, but "wartime nationalism" does not in itself explain the 1940s rightward shift of American politics. In Britain, for example, it did not prevent the election of the Attlee Labour Government. Wartime nationalism, then, was important - but as one of a complex of factors that included the post-war strength of American capitalism, American management's own history and dynamics, and the serious weakening of independent (from the employers and the state) working class organizations.

16. Lichtenstein [1982], op cit, 19; Harry Truman was elected Vice President of the United States on the Roosevelt ticket in 1944 and assumed the presidency on Roosevelt's sudden death in April 1945.

were made illegitimate and union dissent was suppressed under the Smith Act, the liberals kept quiet; and in June 1942, when the Smith-Connally War Labor Disputes Act was passed, they were clearly on the retreat.[17] But the 1946 elections were a rout. In November 1946 the Democratic vote plummeted from 25 to 15 million as more than 60% of the electorate stayed away from the polls. This was a major political defeat for labour since Republican candidates like Richard M Nixon in California successfully red-baited the CIO's Political Action Committee on slogans such as: "A vote for Nixon is a vote against the Communist-dominated PAC with its gigantic slush fund." Only 75 of the 318 candidates supported by the PAC-CIO won, and the Republicans gained majorities in both houses of Congress and among States governments.[18] Two years later Truman was elected President but once again Democratic voters fled the polls. Rough surveys indicated that as many as 30% of voters who considered themselves "strong Democrats" and 45% of "weak Democrats" didn't vote.[19]

The congressional reinforcement of managerial antiunionism provided a public platform for strident anti-Communism: in the

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17. ibid, 65, 153.

18. David Caute, The Great Fear: the anti-Communist purge under Truman and Eisenhower (London: Secker & Warburg, 1978), 27. The CIO's Political Action Committees were formed in 1944 to campaign for the re-election of Roosevelt in response to the poor Democratic performance - especially in the CIO strongholds of the Midwest - in the 1942 elections; Davis, op cit, 70.

19. Angus Campbell, "A Classification of Presidential Elections", in eds Clubb and Allen, op cit, 107-9.

79th Congress (1945-46) there had been four investigations into Communism; in the 80th Congress (1947-48) there were 22; 24 in the 81st (1949-50); 34 in the 82nd (1951-52) and in the 83rd Congress (1953-54) when Senator McCarthy was chairman of the Senate's Government Operations Committee, there were 51.[20] Anti-Communism strengthened the already powerful pressures that were conservatizing the CIO union leaderships, and weakened the confidence of those who advocated continued resistance. During these years, liberalism, as well as all forms of socialism, was systematically denounced as "anti-American".[21] Resisting the employer was difficult enough; resisting the full power of the state was usually impossible. By February 1947 there were more than 250 anti-labour bills pending in both houses of Congress, and on June 23 1947 Congress overrode President Truman's veto to enact the Taft-Hartley Act. This created a series of legal obstacles to the continued growth of union density and to the effective exercise of union bargaining power: it gave the National Labor Relations Board powers to outlaw secondary boycotts and 'jurisdictional' strikes and virtually ruled out the establishment of new closed shops; it prohibited strikes by federal government employees and gave the President the power to order 'cooling-off' periods in disputes that he decided affected

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20. McCarthy chaired its Sub-Committee on Investigations; Caute, op cit, 85, 106.

21. Christopher Lasch, The Agony of the American Left: One hundred years of radicalism (London: Penguin, 1973), 66-7.

the national health and safety; it allowed employers to file damage suits against unions for breach of contract; and it obliged both local and international union officers to file affidavits swearing they were not members of the Communist Party in order to secure NLRB recognition of union shops and condemnation of illegal actions by the employers.[22]

After token resistance, the CIO and AFL leaderships agreed to accept the Act. Ten years later the NLRB reported that 250 international unions had made the necessary rule changes with some 2,750 officers having completed non-Communist affidavits, while 21,500 locals were in compliance with some 193,500 affidavits.[23] The implications for both organizing internal union opposition and shop floor dissent, and even for the expression of political views independent of both the company and the union leaders, were considerable. If 200,000 successful candidates for stewards, committeemen and local officers had filed statements that they didn't belong to the Communist Party, it is safe to assume that in the course of the 1950s at least four or five times that number of unsuccessful candidates had also done so. Across America, then, perhaps a million shop floor union activists joined the millions of federal employees whose past and present political views were

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22. Preis, op cit, 314-5.

23. Caute, op cit, 356.

investigated under the loyalty programme, Executive Order 9835, that Truman issued in March 1947.[24] Little wonder then that the contours of shop floor struggle in the late 1940s and 1950s, like political dissent itself, remained largely hidden from view, while anti-Communist factions in the CIO used the opportunity to consolidate their power.

Developments within the UAW were typical of what occurred in many CIO unions, although Walter Reuther's Socialist Party background gave his leadership a more radical rhetoric than most. Reuther was narrowly elected UAW president in 1946, having emerged from leading the 1945-46 GM strike with the reputation of a militant; but already his political support came from an alliance of his personal base of anti-Communist ex-Socialists with conservative anti-Communists mobilized by the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists. As anti-Communism became a still bigger issue in 1947, around the foreign policy stance of the Truman Doctrine[25] and the Marshall Plan, so Reuther consolidated control

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24. Caute cites an estimate that in 1958 about 13.5 million Americans came within the scope of the loyalty program; to this total he adds another 4.5 million who worked in the private sector in defense related industries and in companies where the employer or the union had inspired a security program to reach a conclusion that about one in every five working people in the mid-1950s had to take an oath or receive clearance as a condition of employment; ibid, 269-70.

25. The 'Truman Doctrine' in foreign policy was laid down by President Truman at a joint session of Congress in March 1947. It committed the US to support anti-Communist governments anywhere in the world. Caute argues this full-bloodied adoption of Cold War policy set the pace for domestic red-baiting; op cit, 30.

of the UAW IEB and set about red-baiting any opposition.[26] In 1948, when it became clear that the left faction in the CIO was supporting Henry Wallace against Truman in the presidential election, Reuther rapidly dropped the idea of a third party candidate, mobilized the UAW behind Truman and then used Wallace's low poll of just over 1 million votes to isolate still further his internal union opponents.[27] At the 1949 CIO Convention, Reuther attacked the leaders of the eleven remaining left-controlled or influenced CIO unions because "they are not free men, they are not free agents".[28] Subsequently the UAW joined in poaching members from the expelled unions or supported the new right-wing unions the CIO set up to replace them. In 1952, Reuther allowed UAW officials in Detroit to testify before the House of UnAmerican Activities Committee to try and undermine the sole remaining significant dissident local in the UAW, Local 600.[29] Anti-Communism and bureaucratic manipulation went hand-in-hand as Reuther restricted the exercise of the UAW's

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26. Thirty years later the former Trotskyist Bert Cochran underlined the role of anti-Communism as Reuther's sole unifying policy in the late 1940s: "For the Reuther faction the Red issue had become the transcendent proposition that defined and demarcated it in the union constellation and determined its outside alliances, the rallying point on which to marshal its troops, the axis around which the struggles for supremacy had to be waged." op cit, 259.

27. In this period Reuther changed the constitution to allow the IEB to intitiate disciplinary charges against members (1949) and established that local union newspapers couldn't print articles "detrimental" to the international policy (1951); ibid, 326-7.

28. Quoted in Preis, op cit, 408.

29. William D Andrews, "Factionalism and anti-Communism: Ford Local 600", Labor History, Vol 20, 3 (Spring 1979), 229, argues that the Communist Party presence in Local 600 in the late 1940s and early 1950s was exaggerated by Reuther to provide an excuse for action against non-Communist opponents.

traditional pluralist democracy.

As Reuther consolidated control over the UAW and anti-Communism and Taft-Hartley began to restrict the potential union challenge to managerial power, the auto industry employers gradually came to see the benefits of formalizing close company and industry-wide bargaining relationships with his machine. In 1948 GM offered an escalator cost-of-living clause in exchange for a two year contract; and in 1950 Reuther negotiated the "Treaty of Detroit", five-year pattern contracts first with GM, then Ford and Chrysler that included properly-funded pension schemes. The role of the international shifted perceptibly from supporting internally-resourced local union organizations, to taking all the key decisions itself.[31] Two trends merged: the centralization of union power in the hands of a few well-placed international officers who then saw wildcat action as a threat to their control,[32] and the growing recognition by the larger employers that in a period of rapid growth and technological change, bargaining institutions were most favourable to their interests

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30. Cochran, op cit, 279; Frank Marquart, An Autoworker's Diary (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 1975), 139.

31. Herbert Irvine's careful contemporary study of shop stewards and UAW democracy explained the result: "The leadership has established a thoroughgoing control in the realm of collective bargaining and strikes, greatly limiting the initiative of secondary leaders and the rank and file itself in these matters." "The UAW-CIO Shop Steward. A Consideration of his role as a force for democracy" (MA thesis, Univesity of Buffalo, February 1951), 86.

32. Irving Howe and B J Widick, The UAW and Walter Reuther (New York: Random, 1949), 182; Marquart, op cit, 109-110.

if they were constructed outside the workplace.[33] Amid the economic expansion and labour retreat of the post-war decade, this merger encouraged the realpolitik of business unionism: the advocacy by the union's leaders of contracts that gave increasing financial benefits to union members in return for shop floor policies that provided the best environment possible for profitable production. Marking the general acceptance of this ideological approach by both CIO and AFL unions, and precipitated by the need for a joint response to the Eisenhower administration elected in 1952, AFL and CIO presidents Meany and Reuther symbolically shook hands and the two federations fused to form the AFL-CIO in December 1955.[34]

Business unionism, however, did not work well for everyone. Between 1947 and 1960 the population of the United States rose from 144 million to 180 million and median family income rose by 40%.[35] In 1962 Michael Harrington wrote that "Millions and tens of millions enjoy the highest standard of life the world has ever known." But behind that reality he also uncovered another: the "invisible" poverty of 40-50 million people, "the unskilled

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33. Caute points out that the sophisticated approach of many of the larger corporations on labour relations and the Communist threat were not shared by most smaller business groups. As late as 1949, the US Chamber of Commerce continued to see the CIO's support for New Deal federal intervention as a threat to free enterprise: "In spite of a partial house-cleaning, the CIO has never rid itself of its Marxist economics. Virtually every important speech and publication... is replete with class consciousness, hatred for employers..."; op cit, 350.

34. Preis, op cit, 512-7.

35. US Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1980 (Washington DC: US Department of Commerce, 1980), 6, 451.

workers, the migrant farm workers, the aged, the minorities".[36] And as Greer argues, while "before World War II, the business cycle and urban prosperity moved together, after the war they no longer did".[37] America was large enough, geographically and economically, for both realities to co-exist for a time. But such mass poverty was not totally "invisible": it exerted a political hold on those closest to it, the semi-skilled black or migrant farmworker first-generation factory worker. And it was never far from the consciousness of the most recent immigrants. In 1940 11.4 million Americans were first-generation immigrants; in 1948 some 205,000 European wartime refugees joined them, and between 1950 and 1952 a special Displaced Persons Commission conducted "the most rigorous system of security and intelligence investigations in the history of American immigration" to admit 390,000 post-war refugees, over 70% of whom came from the Eastern Bloc. The twin fears of Communism and poverty played a significant role in the political consciousness of these largely urban workers, and for many of them McCarthyism became a natural way of displaying their Americanism.[38] Among poor or recently-poor white workers even American poverty appeared to work against dissent.

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36. Michael Harrington, The Other America: Poverty in the United States (London: Penguin, 1962), 155, 9-10.

37. Greer, op cit, 97.

38. Richard Polenberg, One Nation Divisible: Class, race, and ethnicity in the United States since 1938 (New York: Viking Press, 1980), 34, 121-6.

Blacks, however, experienced the contradictions of post-war American "freedom" most acutely. In 1945 few blacks were allowed to vote in the 'Jim Crow' states of the old South; fifteen years later it still took courage for many blacks even to register to vote. And non-white median family income was still just 55% of white family income in 1960, having been 51% in 1947, despite the rapid migration of blacks from farm to blue collar jobs in the 1940s and 1950s.[32] In the South dynamiting took over from lynchings in the late 1950s as the Ku Klux Klan fought to maintain white supremacy against the new black civil rights movement.[33] In the North racism continued inside the industrial labour force.[34] Wartime labour shortages and federal policy after Roosevelt's response to the 1942 March on Washington Movement had encouraged the auto companies to hire more blacks - the proportion in Chrysler's Detroit plants rose from 2.5% to 15% within a year from May 1942. But it was accompanied by a major anti-black race riot by whites in central Detroit and in the plants the upgrading of blacks out of foundry and unskilled work

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32. US Bureau of the Census, The Social and Economic Status of the Black Population in the United States: an historical view, 1790-1978 (Washington DC: Department of Commerce, 1980), Current Population Reports: Special Studies Series P-23: No. 80, Table 14, 31; in 1940 38% of black male workers, 14 and over, were in blue collar jobs and 41% worked on farms; by 1960 the proportions were 54% and 11% respectively; Table 53, 74.

33. David M Chalmers, Hooded Americanism: the history of the Ku Klux Klan (New York: New Viewpoints, 1981), 349-350.

34. Philip S Foner, Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619-1973 (New York: International Publishers, 1976), 317.

took much longer. Blacks were fully accepted as semi-skilled workers, first in the physically-hard body shops and then in assembly, by the late 1940s, but they were still not allowed to enter the skilled or white collar jobs. In the 1950s Chrysler employed only 24 blacks among 7,425 skilled workers and only one among 350 apprentices.[36]

Black workers in all blue collar jobs except labouring or foundry work held significantly lower seniority in the 1950s than most whites. So when the big lay-offs occurred at Chrysler almost every two years through the 1950s, they also tended to be laid off more frequently.[37] This was particularly true in the national recession of 1957-58 that was used by many labour relations departments to establish a new "hard line" on work discipline.[38] Managements, for a time, discovered that unemployment and lay-offs were much more effective in policing shop floor practices

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35. August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 213.

36. James A Geschwender, Class, Race and Worker Insurgency: the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 41.

37. B J Widick, "Black Workers: Double Discontent", Auto Work and its Discontents, ed. B J Widick (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 56.

38. This is discussed in three articles by Frank C Pierson, H R Northrup and Jack Barbash in Industrial Relations, Vol 1, No 1, October 1961.

than was a close relationship with union leaders.[39] These were often reduced to running after the employers reminding them of how useful they had been to them in the past. Between 1957 and 1958 while total employment at four Chrysler Detroit plants fell from 45,584 to 22,776, black employment fell from 20.3% to 14.7%.[40] In the recession that ended the 1950s, many black workers appreciated that business unionism had not provided them with anything like equality or opportunity of earnings. A mass base was being created in the black community that would support the militant civil rights movement and black riots of the 1960s. For black workers the disillusion with business unionism was still more complete since the pro-civil rights UAW only elected its first black IEB member in 1963.[41]

Meanwhile, white workers' support for the 'strong, and honest', Republican candidate, ex-World War II commander Eisenhower, first in the Korean War election of 1952 and again in 1956 led to the up-and-coming Democratic presidential contender, the millionaire Catholic Senator John F Kennedy, taking an active part in the proceedings of the high-profile anti-racketeering McLellan Commission where his younger brother Robert was chief counsel. The Commission, set up in 1957, soon resulted in the

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39. Leonard R Sayles and George Srauss, The Local Union (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1967), 161.

40. Geschwender, op cit, 40.

41. Detroit Free Press, Blacks in Detroit (Detroit Free Press reprint, December 1980), 44.

AFL-CIO expelling three unions and suspending five others. In 1959 Kennedy became a leading protagonist of the 1959 Landrum-Griffin Act. This was ostensibly aimed against the gangster element in the unions, but its provisions vastly increased the power of the centralized union bureaucracies to compel dissident locals to observe contracts signed with employers. Eleven years after Truman had won the presidency on a platform that included the repeal of Taft-Hartley, the Democratic Party stood squarely on a program of more rather than less state control of union organization.[42]

II. Issues

The significant institutionalization of American labour relations in the 1940s and 1950s is not in doubt. But the evidence from Dodge Main outlined in the following chapters questions how universal this process was for shop floor relations. It also suggests that management was much less in conscious command of its labour relations strategies than is often assumed. At least three questions follow: first, how far was labour weakened on the shop floor by the support union leaders gave to Roosevelt and big business interests in World War II? Second, was there really a

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42. Guerin, op cit, 186-196.

labour truce in the 1950s? And third, were the changes in the conduct of labour relations throughout the period the result of conscious, deliberate management policy?

World War II is an inevitably controversial area of study since it divides two periods that have spawned incompatible myths - a "golden age of militancy" from the "labour compromise". But such rigid periodization ignores the continuity of labour resistance, and oversimplifies complex processes. Recent views of labour in World War II have been somewhat one-sided, stressing either workers' great spontaneity and political advance[43] or labour's wartime weakness[44] that allowed management to formalize labour relations on its terms. The argument here is that both workplace unionism and corporate management were strengthened in World War II. The conjuncture of a tight labour market with a still largely unstructured shop floor unionism strengthened American workers' shop floor self-confidence. But simultaneously the war strengthened American capitalism internationally,

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43. Martin Glaberman, Wartime Strikes: the struggle against the no-strike pledge in the UAW during World War II (Detroit: Bewick, 1980), 133-4, counterposes a "political" resistance by wartime strikers to the rapid growth and bureaucratization of the UAW, but marries the two in a bureaucratic victory explained by "sufficient concessions" and the "quick incorporation of the accumulated militancy". But how "political" was the wartime wildcat resistance if it could be so easily and rapidly overcome?

44. Roger Keeran, op cit, 235-6, argues that the war "undermined labor's power"; Nelson Lichtenstein, "Industrial Unionism under the No Strike Pledge: a study of the CIO during the Second World War", (PhD thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1974), 334, suggests it weakened UAW locals. This argument explains the shift to the right in the union and the nation at the end of the war and the resulting consolidation of managerial authority, but plays down the advance of workplace restraints over wartime managements.

introduced American employers to close working relations with a state apparatus they had formerly regarded with suspicion, and reduced the independence from both state and employers of the recently-established CIO national structures. The post-war balance of forces tilted clearly in favour of the employers, but it remained complex and contradictory.

The evidence Glaberman marshals to suggest that the war years undermined the auto employers' shop floor authority is confirmed by the strike statistics and analysis of strike causes made by the wartime employers' Automotive Council.[45] For three months, December 1944 to February 1945, they locate strikes by plant and corporation and suggest a high level of worker combativity at a time when all strikes were unauthorized and opposed publicly by all the members of the UAW IEB:[46]

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45. Glaberman, op cit, 35-61.

46. Privately there appears little doubt that certain IEB members encouraged, or at least didn't discourage, several of the unauthorized strikes. See Chapter 9 for the 1943 and 1945 Dodge Main strikes.

TABLE 8

WARTIME STRIKES, STRIKE FREQUENCY AND CAUSE, DECEMBER 1944-FEBRUARY 1945

Firm	No. of stoppages	Frequency per 1000 manual workers	Strike issue	Strikes No.	Strikes % of total
Chrysler	33	.42	Against disciplinary measures	50	34.5
General Motors	15	.05	Job problems: standards, tools	25	17.2
Ford	31	.27	Working conditions	21	14.5
			Union issues: solidarity	14	9.6
aBriggs	17	1.21	Classification, demarcation	12	8.3
Packard	8		Pay, piecework	9	6.2
Hudson	4		Seniority	7	4.8
Internatl. Harvester	3		Racial discrimination	2	1.4
			Manning levels	2	1.4
18 others	22		Overtime, lay-offs, cleaning	3	2.1
	133		bTotal	145	100.0

SOURCE: Reported Work Stoppages in Automobile Plants, cited in Martin Glaberman, Wartime Strikes: The Struggle against the No-Strike Pledge in the UAW during World War II (Detroit: Bewick, 1980), 51-60.

NOTE: a.Briggs plants had a reputation for bad conditions and an antagonistic management (see p 35 above), and the multi-plant local which organized them, Local 212, contained several leading wartime Trotskyists such as Ernie Mazey (Emil's youngest brother) and Genora Johnson (formerly organizer of the Flint Women's Auxilliary), cf Anderson and Jefferys, . The 1937 Briggs contract had explicitly recognized shop stewards and the existence of a powerful shop stewards' system in the thirteen Detroit Briggs plants taken over by Chrysler in 1953 added to Chrysler's own problems.

b.Several strikes were reported as having more than one cause, so the total number of issues analysed is 12 more than the total number of strikes.

The table confirms the particularly high strike frequency at Chrysler, while the detailed analysis of their reported causes makes it clear that managerial authority was the biggest single issue in contention: one third of all strikes were protest stoppages against management disciplining workers.

Keeran suggests this "intensification of class conflict" led to a growing divorce between "the ranks" and their union leaders that helped undermine labour's power.[47] But strikes in defence of

47. Keeran, op cit, 235-7.

struggled-for restraints over arbitrary management are an unlikely source of labour weakness. More to the point, this upturn in rank-and-file struggle dispelled management's hopes that it could entirely rely on the union leaders. As real wages declined in late 1944 and in 1945, the No Strike Pledge became more unpopular and many secondary union leaders reflected the wave of frustration[48] - a development that confirmed management's determination to launch a post-war offensive. This was not a sign of weakness. Even the most sophisticated management at GM still genuinely believed the UAW was stronger after the war than before - precisely because of its shop floor strength:

> ...union representatives are demanding and succeeding inch by inch in obtaining the demand that they exercise judgment before management can act...To yield to such a demand would mean the end of free enterprise with efficient management...49

The independence of "the ranks" was, from management's viewpoint, the most threatening form of union strength: and it was a central problem for it in the second half of the 1940s.

Lichtenstein [1974] pointed to three other factors weakening auto union locals during World War II: the disorganization of the union resulting from the conversion to war production; a growing dissatisfaction with the UAW because of its inability to resolve grievances under the No Strike Pledge; and the role of the War

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48. Reuther, too, ably built up much political capital through his end-of-war militancy in 1945; Lichtenstein [1982], op cit, 214-215.

49. Walter Gordon Merritt, GM counsel, New York Times, December 29 1945, cited in the 1948 study by Neil W Chamberlain, The Union Challenge to Management Control, (New York: Archon, 1967), 3, whose assessment it is that this was the "prevalent" management view.

Labour Board in delaying the resolution of disputes. Each of these can, however, be interpreted differently. The conversion effect dispersed the existing layer of union activists across a much larger labour force and so helped to spread union consciousness. The No Strike Pledge did tie the union leaders closely to the industrial-military alliance, and encourage constitutional changes that formally restricted local union autonomy. But the ties were neither universal, as John L Lewis' wartime record shows,[51] nor did they work homogeneously on all union leaderships. Also, the shop floor experience was contradictory. For while locals benefited from the government's 'gift' of a stable and growing membership, very large numbers of auto workers experienced wildcat strike action and a degree of self-reliance in numbers far greater than those involved in the auto sit-downs of 1937.[52] Finally, while it is clear that in 1943 management used the WLB to shelve grievances, by 1945 the balance of forces in some plants had clearly shifted, and it was often in the workers' interests to delay the hearing of a grievance so the status quo prevailed as long as possible. The valid argument that both the NWLB and the impartial umpire systems tended to take problem-solving away from the plant has to be

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50. Lichtenstein [1974], op cit, 334.

51. Preis, op cit, 174-197.

52. Edwards P K [1983], op cit, 7, shows that the number of workers involved in reported strikes outside the coal industry rose 23% from 33.8 per 1,000 employees from 1937 to 1941 to 41.6 per 1,000 from 1942 to 1945.

counterbalanced, during the period of the No Strike Pledge, by the increased scepticism with which workers viewed both the intervention of the international UAW representative and the performance of the "impartial" umpire or WLB officer.[53]

Wartime restraints on managerial authority did not evaporate overnight. In some areas of industry they were largely eliminated in the late 1940s, as union leaders bargained away the job control exercised by semi-skilled workers for more tangible economic returns. Their elimination was not, however, a peaceful process. Many employers isolated unions in major confrontations, decimated

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53. In his broadest treatment of the subject, Nelson Lichtenstein, Labor's war at home: the CIO in World War II (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), presents a much more satisfactory account of the wartime coexistence of enhanced shop floor power over front-line management with national labour subservience to the military-industrial alliance. This contradiction could not outlast the wartime emergency and when this ended, Lichtenstein argues, management's wartime strength allowed it to generalize its ascendency over the national leaderships of the CIO to a plant level ascendency over workplace union organization.

the socialist base inside the unions and then extended legitimacy to the limited form of business unionism that survived. Restraints were not eliminated everywhere. Other employers failed to grasp the nettle of the permanent arrival of a labour presence and conducted a vigorous anti-unionism that in turn bred active resistance; and still others lacked the financial base to take on their unions in those first important confrontations. As Robert MacDonald's study of labour relations in the post-war automobile industry concluded: "Under collective bargaining, differences in labour practices were in large part attributable to differences in the judgement, skill and foresight exercised by respective managements."[54] At Chrysler, despite a series of management assaults during World War II, a strong tradition of sectional union activity survived that allowed the custom and practice of mutuality to operate over many aspects of job organization until the late 1950s.[55] The survival of such struggled-for restraints in a major American "core" corporation raises doubts about the characterization of post-war period as a "labour truce".[56] The terms "truce" and "compromise" imply voluntarily-entered agreements by two sides to cease hostilities in exchange

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54. Robert M MacDonald, Collective Bargaining in the Automobile Industry: A study of Wage Structure and Competitive Relations (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 396-7.

55. Similar restraints by semi-skilled workers over managerial authority were largely eroded in GM plants by the late 1940s, and in Ford by the mid-1950s; Anderson and Jefferys, op cit.

56. Gordon et al, op cit, 216-9; Brecher, op cit, 342.

for mutual benefits. Yet there was nothing voluntary about the movement of the frontier of control between management and managed in this period. Hostilities never ceased; and benefits were certainly never genuinely mutual. The picture is one of consistent struggle in which, when the workers were defeated in one area of job control, management stepped up hostilities to try and remove other restraints from workplace legitimacy. Hostilities only ceased temporarily, after a management defeat, as if to give time to allow a further attack. Managing shop floor resistance was thus a major problem for management during the 1940s and 1950s. Some companies did so with less open conflict than others, but the problem was the same for them all. At the point of production, workers experience was not of a "labour truce but of continuing managerial pressure. How visible open conflict was depended on the interaction of management with the workplace union traditions.[57]

This analysis of a shifting and contested frontier of control in the post-war period cuts through the suggestion implicit in the one-sided "truce" periodization of the post-war years that management behaviour on labour relations was determined by some master plan; that the most sophisticated long-term view of what were its own best interests was played out in a game whose rules

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57. Macdonald concluded: "The effect of collective bargaining during the period of the 1940s and early 1950s, was to reinforce, as it were, differences in the quality of management, placing thereby an added strain on the competitive positions of less favoured firms"; op cit, 400.

were exclusively determined by management. Seniority has been properly identified as a mechanism by which management can both gain additional power over certain groups of long-service workers and divide their interests from more recently-hired workers.[58] But it did not, and indeed does not, always operate that way. Five years of continuous growth at Chrysler from 1947 to 1951, like the earlier Dodge Main boom from 1933 to 1936, reduced job uncertainty among production workers. It confirmed collective restraints on departmental and sectional supervision's right to use the lay-off and call-back system as a disciplinary mechanism, and forced many departmental superintendents to agree 'no exceptions' to the strict seniority rota. Seniority was a right in workers' eyes; but as long as it still had to be struggled for, it was seen as a component of union legitimacy, rather than as a generous "concession" or as a skillful scheme to establish bureaucratic managerial control.[59] Much of its legitimacy stemmed from the formal and informal acknowledgement given it by

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58. Herding, op cit, 19-20.

59. Edwards R, op cit, posits what is virtually a conspiracy theory of managerial behaviour, 153: "To implement bureaucratic control, capitalists acceded to or independently introduced a series of job protections and personnel policies that tended to shield workers from immediate displacement... Grievance procedures, seniority provisions that concentrate layoffs among workers in entry-level jobs, and the general policy of fostering low turnover create expectations and real experiences of long-term, perhaps lifetime, employment...Capitalists introduced the new scheme for their own purposes, yet they could not control all of its consequences." At Chrysler, however, during the 1940s management respected seniority agreements only because it was actually forced to or because of the threat of industrial action if it didn't.

management at various times.[60] But "fair" movement from job to job and "fair" recall and lay-off patterns were part of the shop floor's collectively-perceived frontier of control, restraining arbitrary acts of management. And in 1949 and 1950 they were not viewed as "concessions" because they were still struggled over.

It is not just that conditions like seniority agreements which began life as struggled-for restraints on management are now being interpreted as originally serving their present function. The view that management had a strategic plan to accommodate and segment labour exaggerates greatly both the managerial forward-planning capability of the 1940s and 1950s, and the way most managers responded to crisis. Thurley and Wood suggest that "strategic thinking" by management is only possible when four sets of conditions are present: [1] a direct relationship between industrial relations and business strategies; [2] the organizational capacity to monitor and explain the strategy; [3] the employees accept the legitimacy of management's control systems; and [4] top managers have sufficient educational training.[61] It is doubtful whether any of these conditions were fully met in Chrysler before the mid-1950s. Chandler suggests the pressure of major growth or new market

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60. In September and October 1945, Chrysler wanted a smooth launch of the first post-war models, so it implemented full departmental seniority provisions in all 30 departments. In the trim shop, Department 99, this meant temporarily laying off all workers employed after August 25 1915; cf DMN, September 29 1945.

61. Thurley and Wood, op cit, 223.

conditions on top executives can force changes in the form of management structure:

> The inherent weakness in the centralized, functionally departmentalized operating company...bec(ame) critical only when the administrative load on the senior executives increased to such an extent that they were unable to handle their entrepreneurial responsibilities efficiently. This situation arose when the operations of the enterprise became too complex and the problem of coordination, appraisal and policy formulation too intricate for a small number of top officers to handle both long-run, entrepreneurial, and short-run, operational administrative activities.62

Williamson explains how these pressures build up to the psychological and temporal limits of effectiveness of individual executives. What he has called "bounded rationality" lays down "finite spans of control" - a rather fancy way of saying 'an executive can only do so much'. He shows how growth itself can undermine managerial efficiency and agrees that top management's initial response to the "radial expansion of the enterprise" is often to insert "additional hierarchical layers". Thus in 1950 Keller appointed L T Colbert Chrysler president while hanging on himself to the chief executive position of chairman. But extending the existing managerial hierarchy rather than drastically reforming it, Williamson suggests, leads to "control loss phenomenon",[63] precisely what happened at Chrysler during the years of joint Keller-Colbert management from 1950 to 1956. Even the period in which Chrysler management deliberately fought to achieve the advantages of the GM labour relations system, from

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62. A D Chandler, Strategy and Structure, (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 282-3, cited in Williamson, op cit, 134.

63. Williamson, op cit, 126.

1956 to 1959, was one of essentially reactive management rather than one where Chrysler finally implemented an inevitable master plan.

III. Structure

Chapter 9 traces the unsuccessful managerial attempts to reassert managerial authority during World War Two. Chapter 10 examines the factors behind Chrysler management's apparent incapacity to regain control in the politically more favourable circumstances of anti-Communism and Reuther faction control of the UAW during the post-war decade, and it details the workplace legitimacy created by the network of restraints over management's 'right to manage'. Chapter 11 examines the watershed years from 1956 to 1959, when a consistent drive by Chrysler management to redraw the shop floor frontier of control was ultimately successful.

CHAPTER 9

WORLD WAR II

SOUND AMERICAN UNIONISM

Chapter 9 has three sections. Each considers a major attempt by Chrysler management to regain autonomy over the setting of workplace rules during World War II. Section one considers the changeover from peacetime to military production and the first opportunity for management to reassert its unilateral authority. Section two examines the 1943 attempt by Chrysler to re-impose unilateral management prerogatives over what was by then a largely new workforce. Finally, section three looks at Chrysler's adoption of a new intransigent strategy in 1944 aimed at rolling back war-time restraints by its semi-skilled workers in preparation for the resumption of mass peacetime production.

I. Changeover to war production

The changeover from civilian to wartime production was particularly traumatic at Dodge Main. The first US Office of Production Management order cutting schedules for the 1942 model

year by 20% was issued in July 1941; and passenger automobile and light truck work ended in January 1942.[1] Chrysler took well over a year to complete the changeover and attempted to use the mass lay-offs and dislocation of union organization to reassert control over the movement of labour and working conditions. With Federal funds providing the means to build a new tank plant and tool up its Chicago plant for aircraft assembly, Chrysler felt no hurry or necessity to concentrate its war production at Dodge.

In July 1941 it refused to transfer laid-off Dodge Main workers to its new Tank Arsenal at Warren, ten miles to the north. In September 1941 it gave 36 Dodge Main paint shop workers a two week penalty lay-off for refusing to give up the tradition of a 20 minute relief period at the shift changeover. Each time, management was forced to abandon its new hard line under threat of strike action.[2] More effective in suppressing the Dodge workforce's resistance was a 25% collapse in average Chrysler manual employment between 1941 and 1942 that coincided with the UAW's No Strike Pledge.[3]

As car production ran down, the threat of industrial action carried decreasing weight, so Local 3 turned to propagandistic

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1. DMN, July 15 1941; Detroit Times, January 21 1942.

2. DMN, July 15, September 15 1941.

3. Chrysler Corporation, Labour Relations Office, Average US Employment 1940-80, October 26 1981, in my possession.

means of fighting back - but was still capable of mobilizing substantial numbers of workers. Just after Pearl Harbor, on the Friday before Christmas Day 1941, 15,000 Dodge workers left their work or came in from lay-off to attend a mass meeting called by Local 3 to protest against "the war slacker" Chrysler. Bill Hill, acting Local 3 President after Pat Quinn took a job on the UAW staff, argued that 75% of Dodge's machining facilities were idle. A UAW Chrysler Department report gave the following breakdown of the low numbers of Chrysler workers engaged on defense work:[4]

De Soto	150	Highland Park Engines	286 (86% on defense)
Jefferson	1500	Amplex	400 (90% on defense)
		Dodge Truck	(43% on defense)
Dodge Main	25 (on gun jobs)		

As late as June 1942, when 5,000 of the 19,500 employed at Dodge Main eight months earlier had still not been called back, 500 maintenance workers staged a Saturday morning "work-in", completing half a shift's work for nothing as a protest against Chrysler's half-speed plant conversion.[5]

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4. DMN, December 18 1941, January 1 1942. Chrysler's draughtsmen, by contrast, were able to use their bargaining strength designing the new tools and lay-outs for war production to win the recognition of their union, the Society of Designing Engineers in December 1941; Harris, op cit, 163.

5. Detroit News, June 14 1942. It should not be assumed this skilled workers' action represented a high level of patriotic enthusiasm. Overtime was one of the two issues which always provoked skilled workers into action [the other was contracting out].

The UAW's "Victory through Equality of Sacrifice" programme was endorsed at a special UAW Conference of selected delegates in April 1942. Potentially it threatened to undermine the exercise of workers' collective shopfloor power. The UAW agreed:

> 1. No strikes during wartime.
> 2. Saturday, Sunday and holidays were to be treated as ordinary working days - overtime premiums would only be paid after eight hours had been worked a day or after 40 hours worked a week.
> 3. To increase the production of war materials.
> 4. To operate arms plants on a 24-hour, 7 day a week basis.6

The "Equality of Sacrifice" programme would clearly limit the restraints union members exercised on managerial rights to determine the hours and conditions of work. But who would carry the No Strike Pledge in the plants? It was available as a powerful propaganda weaponn against action, yet if no-one raised it at the moment workers decided to strike, or if the only person who did was a discredited non-unionist, then the No Strike Pledge would not work.

The steward system could only help raise production if a large proportion of stewards were ideologically and organizationally committed to the No Strike Pledge. In 1942 and 1943 this would have required a much larger Communist Party presence in Dodge Main. The nearby Chrysler Plymouth plant did

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6. UAW, Conference Agenda, April 6 1942.

have a strong CP presence among its Local 51 officers and shop stewards and this clearly had an impact during the war: it was virtually strike free - although even there the stewards were unable to convince the membership to agree to restore the incentive payment system being pushed by the CP.[7] Yet at Dodge Main, the AIWA origins of men like Earl Reynolds, who was elected Local 3 president in 1942, meant that although they supported the No Strike Pledge at first, they were unprepared politically for the hard task of sacrificing their own constituents' immediate interests. Between December 1941 and January 1943 66 work stoppages took place in Chrysler plants[8] and in its bitter pamphlet, Beyond the Facts and the Records, Chrysler commented, "Pearl Habor, labour's no-strike pledge and the national policy against striking did not change this Union's attitude and practices."[9]

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7. See Local 51 Collection, WRL, Box 24; Stewards Council minutes, April 12 1943, where a motion was carried unanimously: "that the Stewards' Council go on record to support the incentive plan and the EB of the Local to work out plan and present it to the membership." As the minutes go on to show, however, the membership did not accept the incentive plan even though it was recommended to them by the EB and the Stewards' Council.

8. Chrysler Corporation, 10 War Labor Reports, August 27 1943, 552, cited in Nelson Lichtenstein, Industrial Unionism under the No Strike Pledge: a study of the CIO during the Second World War, PhD, University of California, Berkeley, 1974, 357.

9. Chrysler Corporation, Beyond the facts and the records: War Labor Board Panel admittedly ignores the Evidence and Rewards Union Irresponsibility (Detroit:1943), 8.

II. The 1943 Offensive

After management fully re-opened Dodge Main on war production in late 1942, it hoped to use the dispersal of union activists to other plants, into the services, and into new departments and on new work, to recover some of its lost control. Jimmy Solomon, the militant chairman of the trim unit (department 99), and a plant committeeman, reported in April 1943 on the whereabouts of former trim department workers still working in Chrysler's Detroit area plants:[10]

Bomber plant	400
Lynch Road	50
Highland Park	200
Tank Arsenal	(a number)
Scattered through Dodge Main	1000
Trim Shop	125

But management found the union tradition at Dodge still dug in. Among those still in the trim shop were Solomon and four chief stewards. Super seniority had allowed a few of those who carried the tradition of organization to survive. It was not the majority. There was a high turnover, for example, in those holding Local 3 office: of the 41 candidates who ran for election in February 1941 only six stood for office again in February 1943.[11] But a core survived. And in the tight labour market of

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10. DMN, April 15 1943. The six Dodge units had a chairman, recording secretary and other officers mirroring the plant-wide organization of Local 3. The stewards' and unit elections took place on the same day.

11. DMN, March 1 1941, February 15 1943.

1943 they taught the new labour force where to draw the established line marking the 'frontier of control' on the new war jobs.[12]

The switch to war production tipped the balance of forces on the shop floor towards the workforce.[13] This was because on cost-plus arms contracts, managerial emphasis shifted from quantity and low labour costs to quality virtually irrespective of labour costs. Gertrude Nalezty, a Dodge Wire Room worker, recalled:

> It was very different during the war. Conditions working on tank wire were much better. They stressed quality. No-one cared about quantity. There were always relief people ready to help out. We were working six days a week but we used to get off early as often as we liked. We'd just ask the foreman and nine times out of ten he'd agree. It was during the war we elected our first woman chief steward, Angie Neuman.[14]

Chrysler attempted to prevent this relaxation of workplace discipline from taking place. It launched a general attack on production rates on war work, trying to reclassify and redefine them at rates below those on civilian work. If the issue was written up as a grievance, lower-level management would simply refuse to bargain on it with the stewards and refer it to the log-

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12. Lichtenstein [1982], op cit, 126, confirms this analysis: "Of greater long-range import was an oppositional infrastructure and a preexisting tradition of struggle into which these new recruits could be acculturated."

13. Nelson Lichtenstein, "Conflict over Workers' Control: the Automobile Industry in World War II", Working-Class America: Essays on Labor, Community and American Society, eds. Michael H Frisch and Daniel J Walkowitz (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 288-90.

14. Interview with author.

jam already before the War Labour Board (WLB).[15] In March 1943, Local 3 President Reynolds argued workers should resist the managerial offensive despite the No Strike Pledge:

> It is the position of the Local Union that they are 100% behind the programme of President Roosevelt and the War Effort, but we are not going to let the Dodge Management use this as an excuse to break down the morale of our members.
>
> Employees who work on a job for a good number of years, and have seniority on the job, should not be moved, unless it is **mutually agreed**, and they are given a job that pays a higher rate.[my emphasis, SJ] 16

Two weeks later the Dodge Main News carried the headline: "Rates still being chiseled - Chrysler Manager rejects all appeals for Fair Dealing."[17] It seemed Chrysler was using the No Strike Pledge unilaterally to redraw workplace rules and habits of rule-making.

Provocation

In May 1943 Dodge Divisional Manager Otto Franke precipitated a major confrontation. He hired six new workers to go directly into Dodge Main's department 229, the Signal Mount, which was known as having good jobs mounting radios and searchlights into their casings. This was seen as a deliberate challenge to an earlier seniority agreement under which management had to offer new war work to existing employees before it took on new labour. There was an immediate walkout, retaliatory firings by Chrysler and then sympathy stoppages in all Chrysler's Detroit plants. Earl Reynolds saw Chrysler's action as a deliberate provocation

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15. Lichtenstein [1974], op cit, 353-4.

16. DMN, March 15 1943.

17. DMN, April 1 1943.

and the Dodge Main News headline was "Treason". Reynolds condemned management and the attack on the strikers by Leo Lamotte, the ex-Plymouth plant worker who was the UAW's Chrysler Department Director; coming from Frankensteen's home base, Reynolds deeply resented LaMotte's charge of 'Reutherism':

> It is unfortunate that Mr Weckler (Chrysler General Manager) was able to bring to his assistance in his efforts at union disruption, certain union officials who chose to ignore the union issues involved...I brand the charge that this dispute was caused by followers of Walter Reuther as an unmitigated lie. I have never been a follower of Reuther. This dispute was caused by Chrysler Management and by no-one else. LaMotte tried to make a political football out of our difficulties...We want to sit down and negotiate matters, but if the Dodge Management want us to get things the 'hard way', 'getting things the hard way' will be the policy of Dodge Local 3.18

The initial walkout, and the support it got, reflected the strength of Dodge Main's 'do-it-yourself' problem-solving tradition and the contentiousness of the seniority issue in a complex where 90% of the workforce had just been moved to new departments or other plants and where there were wide divergences in the type of work and rates of pay.

Stewards at the other old AIWA stronghold, Local 7, the Jefferson-Kercheval Avenue plant and several smaller and newer plants where the CP had little influence called solidarity strike action.[19] This Detroit-wide industrial action by 27,100 workers coincided with War Labour Board hearings into the state of

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18. DMN, June 1, June 15 1943.

19. Lichtenstein (1974), op cit, 353-356.

collective bargaining at Chrysler, set up following a break-down in negotiations on a new contract. LaMotte did not believe it was a coincidence and neither, of course, did Chrysler - who were certain the strike was an attempt to influence the War Labor Board to establish an impartial umpire system. They quoted Ed Carey, the Local 7 president, as saying, "I have been asked what it is the men want. The men request an impartial arbitrator."[20]

In 1940 GM had introduced an umpire as the final stage of a centralized grievance procedure in a move advocated by Reuther;[21] Ford had done the same in its first contract in 1941. Reuther recognized the double benefits accruing from the system: on the one hand an external restraint on arbitrary management to adhere to a standard set of workplace rules; on the other, a mechanism to create an appearance of judicial 'fairness' that would help channel rank and file anger away from the potentially dangerous conflicts he saw as a threat to the survival of the union.

After the Communist Party line changed in mid-1941 to all-out support for the war, this view of the importance of a rigid grievance procedure ultimately legitimated by an 'outside'

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20. Chrysler Corporation, Beyond the facts and the records, 13.

21. Lichtenstein [1982], op cit, 54.

umpire holding the power of redress, became common to all factions of the UAW's IEB. For the same reasons, the WLB - composed of New Deal interventionists [22] - also encouraged the erection of GM-type appeal structures. It saw them as a means of persuading workers against taking immediate action by holding out the promise of an impartial enquiry by an 'outsider'.

The incorporative aspects of the umpire procedures can, however, be exaggerated.[23] This is because they are often considered separately from their context: some resulted from management, international union or WLB pressure; but on other occasions procedural changes were only conceded after struggles against management. The 'defusing' consequences of a 'struggled-for' umpire system were not necessarily identical to those where an umpire system was delivered as part of management's labour relations strategy. With two top managers and two UAW IEB members sitting on its existing final appeal board, Chrysler viewed 'independent' umpire systems as a get-out for the UAW to avoid disciplining workers who broke the No Strike Pledge and the UAW-Chrysler contract. It, and most other wartime managements, saw the 'outside' umpire system as a threat to managerial

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22. ibid, 51-3.

23. ibid, 179, writes: "Despite its concrete advantages and hopeful potentiality, the grievance procedure worked to defuse union power and legitimate managerial authority." As a description of the effect of the umpire system over a period of 20 years this is fair comment, but it could not be said to have had such a dramatic effect on Chrysler labour relations in its first few years.

prerogatives.[24]

Management defeat

The strike action by other plants was a direct expression of solidarity and a bargaining mechanism through which both local officers and certain international officers let the WLB know what was on their mind. Frankensteen's links with Dodge Main and R J Thomas' connections with the Jefferson plant may well have had more bearing on this action than has yet come to light. As it was, an umpire system did indeed turn out to be one of the outcomes of the strike. On August 27 1943 Directive Order No 3950CS-D was issued by the National War Labor Board extending the grievance procedure at Chrysler to include an impartial chairman at the final UAW-Chrysler appeal stage. But two other outcomes proved more significant in the shorter-term: those fired for leading the walkout from the Signal Mount were reinstated; and Chrysler renewed transferring workers into Department 229 in accordance with the transfer agreement.[25]

The May 1943 confrontation ended in a fairly decisive management defeat. This was not a political anti-war militancy; nor was it the "balkanization" of Chrysler plants into

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24. ibid, 20. Chrysler held the dominant management view described by Harris, op cit, 51-52, that the NWLB was an intrusion and should confine "recognition of the union's institutional existence and legitimacy to an absolute minimum."

25. DMN, June 15 1943.

competing sections.[26] The Dodge Main News carried the Stars and Stripes and the slogan - "Give it your best!". Reynolds summed up Dodge Main's politics when he wrote, "The only faction we propose to tolerate in our Local Union is a faction that stands for good, sound American unionism."[27] Chrysler was brought to a halt by "sound American unionism" with the organizational base to defend restraints over the movement of labour and manning and production levels. And Dodge workers continued to do so: in September the 600 workers on day and afternoon shifts in the gun plant walked out when a steward was disciplined for refusing to move from one machine to another; in December, 150 day shift machine operators in the Gyro compass department, some 60% of the total, quit work 90 minutes early to protest the delay in getting a WLB hearing on a disputed job classification.[28] When the Gyro workers actually got the WLB directive it was in Chrysler's favour. This also provoked a strike and the inevitable management denunciation: "This is a strike against the government and the war effort."[29] But for the workers the reality was quite

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26. Glaberman is wrong to argue that all the wartime wildcats were "political" because they defied the No Strike Pledge and aimed to influence the government, op cit, 128; but equally, Lichtenstein [1983], is wrong to argue "these job actions lacked the overall union-building context that had given prewar strikes of this sort a more consistently progressive character"; op cit, 297. The wartime strikes, like those prewar, occurred on issues dictated by management, and simultaneously included and could reflect both class-wide and fractional reactions.

27. DMN, June 15 1943.

28. Detroit News, September 16, December 15 1943.

29. Detroit Times, January 1 1944.

different: for them it was a strike about work rules - how much a job would pay, who would work it and how the decisions were taken. These issues became even more important for the management as the end of the war approached.

The significance of the Gyro strike at Dodge Main and the 1944 strike wave in the auto industry should not be underestimated. There is little evidence that the WLB's umpire system and national grievance procedure encouraged the drift of bargaining away from the shop floor during the peak years of wartime employment, as it did after the war.[30] Similarly, neither the No Strike Pledge nor disciplinary efforts by the international to impose external regulation of job behaviour appear to have had much impact on the tradition of internal job regulation and local union autonomy at Chrysler.

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30. Certainly, what Lichtenstein [1982] describes as "the bureaucratic imperative", op cit, 178-202, was only rarely visible at Chrysler, and when it was it was not particularly intimidating.

III. End of the War

In 1944 Chrysler began planning for the post-war period. Highly conscious of the 'drift' in production rates and workplace discipline that had occurred since 1941, management initiated a new labour relations strategy: plant managers were instructed not to negotiate with strikers - a policy they could not always operate, particularly in those plants increasingly hostile to the No Strike Pledge.[31] Managers were also told to restore work standards and manning levels to pre-war levels.

In May 1944, the stewards' council at the Dodge Truck plant in Warren decided to ban overtime to prevent management from building up "a bank that will be detrimental to the manpower set-ups in the various departments on civilian production".[32] In October this issue flared into a strike when management made overtime compulsory for repairmen, and tried to use the resulting strike to reintroduce civilian production standards. An exchange between Mr Anderson, the Labor Relations Supervisor, and the plant shop committee led by Arthur Hughes, Local 140 president

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31. See Arthur Hughes, WSU, 20-22.

32. Arthur Hughes Collection, WRL, Box 2/20. Minutes of Joint Meeting of Local 140 Organizing Committee and Stewards' Council, May 11 1944.

and secretary of the UAW's 'Rank and File Caucus' which campaigned against the No Strike Pledge, illustrates the gap between the two sides:

> Anderson: Before returning to work we must have an agreement that when returning to work our employees will produce at the production rates and the quality standards maintained on both Civilian and Army Production prior to 100% Army work.
> Hughes: They could not go along on an agreement of this kind because conditions are not the same as pre-war... If it requires two employees to perform a certain operation on army vehicles, it should certainly require at least the same number of employees to perform the same operation on civilian trucks.33

The transition from army to civilian production at Dodge Truck did not involve a transformation in the plant lay-out or a different kind of work. So the pressure exerted by its management was primarily on manning levels.

At Dodge Main, where wartime production was characterized by individual bench assembly and machining work,[34] the new managerial control strategy had two aims. First, to speed up production and eliminate the wartime practice of workers producing at what they considered a 'fair' rate while a disputed standard went through the grievance procedure. And second, to

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33. Arthur Hughes Collection, WRL, Box 2/17. Plant shop committee Minutes, October 11 1944.

34. Detroit News, February 27 1945. Dodge Main's facilities in 1944 were allocated as follows:

	%
Production of engines for light and heavy trucks, tank transmissions and rocket shells:	68
Manufacture of parts for aircraft:	22
Manufacture of Navy bofors anti-aircraft guns:	10
	100%

overhaul the plant's facilities as early as possible to prepare for the reintroduction of automobile production.[35] Early in 1945, as demand for war production began to slow down, Chrysler made a third wartime bid to reassert managerial autonomy. What happened is worth considering in some detail since the dense steward network at Dodge Main, the supportive role of the local's officials and their relative independence from the international, and the struggle's outcome - the confirmation of mutuality - would epitomize Chrysler's industrial relations over the next ten years.

Ultimatum

On February 7 1945 management issued a new work standard to the oil pump gear cutters working in the B-29 bomber engine parts department. It was based on a new time study method that included a "Non-Production Time Schedule":[36]

	Of working day	
	(%)	(mins)
Personal use	3	14
Unavoidable delay	3	14
Fatigue	5	24
Tooling up	9	43
Per 8 hour shift:	20	99

35. This was the interpretation of management's actions given by Mike Novak, Local 3 President, Detroit News, February 24 1945: "The management wants to transfer the B-29 bomber parts work to the Dodge plant in Chicago. The Corporation wants to use the space here in preparation for civilian automobile production."

36. Detroit News, February 25 1943.

The time study showed an automatic machine was capable of producing 225 parts a day. So, taking the 20% non-productive time off, the workers were set a daily rate of 184 over the full eight hour shift. This was a dramatic increase, since the workers had begun turning out the job at 108 per day and when the new time study came out were completing an average of 150. The stewards in the 1,100-strong B-29 department advised the men to ignore the new production standard and filed a grievance. Two days later the seven machinists were given a three-day suspension for not working to the new standard, and the whole Unit 234 workforce stayed away with them. The grievance was rejected at stage one on February 10 by their superintendent and at the second stage on February 21 by the Labor Relations Supervisor.[37]

The following morning at 9.30 am, without waiting for the third stage involving an international UAW officer, the supervision sacked the seven machinists and a stock handler for "loafing, insubordination and refusing to keep up production". The machinists had refused to report their previous day's production, and the stock handler had refused to count it and report on them. One of the gear cutters was Earl C York, the 47-year-old Unit 234 chairman and World War 1 veteran who had worked at Dodge Main for 12 years and had a son in the army in Belgium. All 743 workers on the dayshift immediately walked out, many

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37. Detroit Free Press, March 2 1945.

passing through other parts of the complex to let the stewards there know what had happened. By midday another 725 workers from other departments had also stopped. Pickets then appeared on the main gates and all but 550 of the 3,450 on the afternoon shift stayed out. By the following morning only 500 out of 9,400, mostly maintenance and a few tool and die workers, crossed the pickets. Crucially, only 18 of the 100 Dodge Main-based inter-plant drivers who transferred parts and equipment between Chrysler's 13 Detroit area plants, reported for work on Friday. And one of these was beaten up by two of the striking truckers after completing his shift. By Saturday afternoon just seven out of 54 interplant drivers reported and all Chrysler's Detroit plants began to grind to a halt. On Sunday a Local 3 membership meeting voted to complete the stoppage by calling out all the maintenance workers still working.[38]

The UAW's intervention followed a classic pattern. Chrysler immediately contacted the international, complaining of war sabotage: "Those who are leading this strike are apparently deliberately trying to sabotage the war effort because some of their members were disciplined for refusing to do their war work."[39] R J Thomas was in London, so acting-president George Addes instructed the strikers to return within hours of the strike starting:

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38. Compiled from Detroit Free Press, Detroit News, and Detroit Times, February 23-26 1945.

39. Detroit Times, February 23 1945.

> You are hereby ordered by the International Executive Board of the UAW-CIO to return to work. The strike is unauthorized and is a violation of the union's constitution and no-strike pledge. Failure to comply with this order will necessitate immediate action by the International Executive Board.40

The Local 3 Executive Board only got involved formally in the strike that afternoon, when a special EB meeting was held to discuss the Department 234 strike. But their recommendations to the special business meeting of the strikers convened afterwards make it clear they were fully in support of the action. Their advice to the strikers was:

1. Stay out long enough to force the Army to take over Department 234.
2. Demand a Congress investigation of Chrysler.
3. Call for the dismissal of the three Department 234 supervisors involved.41

This support from the centre-right Dodge local leadership reflected its opposition to Chrysler's new time study methods and their defence of the status quo custom and practice that had developed on war jobs. Mike Novak had just been re-elected for a second term. A second generation Pole whose defeat of Reynolds in 1944 reflected the growing involvement of Hamtramck's Polish community in running Local 3, he was the first Dodge president without a background in the Coughlinite AIWA.[42] A strong anti-Communist, he was closer to Reuther's qualified support for the No Strike Pledge in 1944 than to the militant anti-pledge Rank and File Caucus initiated by Trotskyists.

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40. Detroit News, February 23 1945.

41. Local 3 Collection, Box 3; Business Meeting Minutes, February 23 1945.

42. Friedlander, op cit, 127.

The strike occurred a week after the UAW's No Strike Pledge referendum - and was possibly precipitated by Chrysler's forecast of a two to one vote for its retention. But in February the result was still not known and, as it turned out, it was very close in Detroit.[43] With his own re-election just accomplished and interpreting the situation as a kind of policy interregnum while the referendum votes were counted, Novak didn't hesitate. He threw himself entirely behind the strike:

> We strike because we can't relax our principles. We've got to keep them as high as they were just before the war, so veterans can come back to good working conditions.
>
> Servicemen are fighting against what we're fighting against. We are against speed-ups. We are against racial discrimination. We are against abuse of former servicemen. We are against lowering of our working conditions.44

After more than three years of war, patriotism and collective restraints over arbitrary management had become fused in the workplace consciousness of both the 'new' war workers and of many UAW secondary leaders.

Generalization

In another plant the dispute could possibly have been contained among a small group of gear cutters. But at Dodge Main it generalized to a struggle over a key "principle": the dismissal of workers and stewards for refusing to work to what York called

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43. Glaberman, op cit, 116-119. About 25% of the UAW's membership participated in the postal vote and while the vote was 178,824 against rescinding the pledge and 97,620 in favour, in the Detroit metropolitan area the voting was much closer: 54% against and 46% for.

44. Detroit News, February 25 1945.

an "unreasonable" production standard while it was being taken through the grievance procedure. Secondary issues were workers' rights to negotiate with the company and the War Labor Board while on strike. The generalization took place despite directives to return from the international and the Regional War Labor Board because the strength of the 'do-it-yourself' union tradition meant the striking workers spread the action and set up picket lines themselves; and because this tradition had also constructed an organization and organizers in its own image.

The strike lasted 11 days. It was Chrysler's longest wartime wildcat. Dodge Truck and Chrysler's Highland Park plants were closed through lack of materials, while 1,050 were laid off at Chrysler's Windsor plant and the Tank Arsenal. On March 1 the stoppage spread to the Chrysler De Soto-Warren plant where the workers stopped in protest against the use of the railroads to transport critically-needed items usually carried by the striking Dodge interplant truck drivers. Nearly 19,000 Chrysler workers were on strike and another 5,250 were laid off. And on the same day, in another wildcat strike, 11 Detroit Briggs plants voted to strike or were closed down by pickets from the Briggs Mack Avenue plant in protest against the firing of a committeeman and

six shop stewards on February 27.[45] By the time the Dodge strikers finally went back the Detroit Times reported as accurate the opinion of most UAW IEB members that "Every current strike in Detroit was inspired by the Dodge walkout."[46]

The Dodge strike impressed other workers because of its size and strength. But it inspired them because of its success. The Dodge workers openly defied the management, the Regional War Labour Board and the threat of being drafted.[47] They ignored patriotic bluster from the Under Secretary of War and forced a special meeting of the National War Labour Board to be held in Washington while they were still out on strike. This agreed to a special enquiry into the dismissals and the 184 production rate. Three weeks later it found that the men should be reinstated but that they should produce 184 parts a day.[48] Thus while the management did eventually get its speed-up, it was only after 'due process' had been adhered to - including the entry into the plant of time study experts approved by the UAW. And the workers'

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45. Detroit Times, March 3 1945; Detroit News, March 2 1945.

46. Detroit Times, March 5 1945.

47. Detroit News, March 1 1945, quoted one Detroit Draft Board chairman as saying, "It was the policy of his Board to go through there 2-B (deferment classification) lists whenever a war plant strike occurred and to contact the company involved to see if the management wished to withdraw its request for deferment for employees within jurisdiction of the board...This was now being done by these boards in the Dodge dispute."

48. Detroit News, March 21 1945.

resistance to management's reassertion of unilateral rate-fixing was effectively condoned.

The NWLB was not alone in feeling impotent before this strike. The workers and the Local 3 officers also got away with rank defiance of the IEB. After their original instruction to return to work was ignored, the dominant pro-No Strike Pledge faction on the IEB worked full out to bully the Dodge workers back to work. The CP was beside itself with rage, accusing the Dodge workers variously of being "enemy agents", "followers of Reuther" and "reactionaries" playing into the hands of anti-labour elements. A Daily Worker editorial stated:

> The strike of 14,000 at Detroit's Dodge plant which now threatens to shut down the entire Chrysler chain of plants is absolutely indefensible...Only Nazi Germany and Tokyo can profit by its results... The responsibility must be fixed whether it is from labour or management. If it should be proven that not enemy agents, but followers of Reuther incited the walkout, the effect is none the less serious in terms of lives of our fighting men.
>
> Responsible labour and government leaders should step in and act. If drastic measures are not taken, more of such strikes will be encouraged and reactionaries will exploit them to pass more anti-labour bills.49

An editorial in the Detroit Labor News, the publication of the Detroit and Wayne County AFL was even more pointed:

> Hitler's helpers do it again: The Dodge strikers, who are dodging their obligation to the Armed Forces - not bullets - have again run out on the war...
> Adolph shouldn't worry. His little helpers in America will take care of him.50

UAW acting-president Addes chaired one Dodge strike meeting and ran straight into the hostility engendered by the CP's attack on

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49. Detroit Labor News, March 2 1945.

50. Daily Worker, February 27 1945. Keeran, op cit, 226-7, suggests the result of the CP's wartime pro-war policy were "marginal rather than decisive" in terms of CP influence in the UAW. This view is clearly not supported by the evidence at Dodge Main.

the strike. After he, Reuther, and Frankensteen had spoken, all urging a return to work, he opened the meeting to contributions from the floor and called a known 'leftist'. As a result,

> There were cries of "It's a frame-up!" "They've made a deal with the Communists." "Don't let them sell us out!" Several fist fights broke out on the floor, and the word went down the line to prevent "this deal with the Commies" by voting to stay out.51

Novak, who had previously come to an agreement with Addes that he would support the call to return, was swayed by the anger of the meeting to speak against. Addes himself then left the meeting in a fury saying he had "washed his hands of the local". It was Reuther who finally fixed up the deal to which the WLB and Chrysler agreed, and he and Frankensteen who met the National War Labour Board in Washington.

In May 1944 when Local 490 officers had supported a wildcat strike at the Chrysler Highland Park plant, the International put the local under trusteeship for three months. But the offending president, an old Socialist Party member, Bill Jenkins, and his entire slate were re-elected in July.[52] That experience taught the IEB to be wary at Dodge eight months later. It was still Frankensteen's home local, but Reuther's unholy alliance of anti-communist socialists and anti-communist Catholics had helped him build a base there, too. So despite Novak's open defiance, no

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51. Detroit P.M., March 5 1945.

52. Glaberman, op cit, 101-103. Lichtenstein [1982], op cit, 193, also reports the imposition of Leo LaMotte as administrator of Local 490, but he fails to comment on the re-election of the previous incumbent.

action was taken against him or any of Local 3's officers: they were merely reprimanded.[53] Chrysler management had effectively lost this one, too. If it could not count on the UAW disciplining its members in wartime, what could it expect in peacetime? A Chrysler consultant speculated wildly in public:

> As industrial turmoil increases, more and more people will see the evils of collective bargaining and we should look to the time all federal labour laws are repealed.
>
> I condemn collective bargaining as an evil thing which is against public interest and which will increase poverty.[54]

Bruised by their wartime experiences, Chrysler executives still reacted as if they could simply eliminate shop floor union organization. The consultant's speech was no accident: it coincided with the formation of a coalition of anti-union managements led by Chrysler's chairman, B E Hutchinson, aimed at stopping the accommodationist (to unionism) tendency being promoted by the US Chamber of Commerce.

In Chrysler's plants, where supervisors faced union stewards every day, it was a different story. There, a tradition of compromise and accommodation by mutual agreement had taken hold. Far from "additional authority" being removed from "the local union and the rank and file" during the war,[55] the opposite

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53. Detroit Times, March 9 1945.

54. Detroit Times, March 4 1945; speech by John W Scoville, an economic consultant to the Detroit Kiwani club. Chrysler naturally denied his speech reflected corporate policy, although as Harris, op cit, 110-111, shows, the speech which was reproduced as a pamphlet was actually part of a campaign against the 'Charter' for post-war industrial relations signed by the US Chamber of Commerce, the AFL and the CIO.

55. Lichtenstein [1982], op cit, 202.

appears to have been the case: the limits of workplace legitimacy were extended. It was to be at least another ten years before Chrysler management developed both an effective labour relations strategy and the organizational capacity and front-line supervision to execute it. Only in the late 1950s did Dodge Main management finally remove many of the restraints on its authority that dated from the war years.

CHAPTER 10

UNIONISM, SOLIDARITY AND MILITANCY

1946-1955

Chrysler slipped from second to third in the US auto league in the post-war decade. These boom years allowed its autocratic style of management to survive acute problems. Its rigid management 'empires', united only by an all-powerful emperor, meant Chrysler lacked the flexibility and sophistication to relate to new consumer tastes. Chrysler's share of an expanding market fell.

Within 20 months of the end of the war the political environment turned from being supportive of union organization to being markedly hostile. The Taft-Hartley Act and the unleashing of the House Un-American Activities Committee helped bring about major changes in how American workers viewed their collective organizations. So did the victory of the Reuther

faction in the UAW. By 1949 Reuther had effectively destroyed the UAW democratic tradition.[1] These were reflections of a wider defeat for the independent representation of workers' interests. But the extent of the defeat in different industries and companies depended upon the contours of workplace legitimacy.

At Chrysler, the shift in the wider balance of forces between employers and workers had little immediate impact. The local union tradition was more resilient than in GM; the weakness of the CP at Dodge Main meant it was less of a target than was Ford's River Rouge plant; and Chrysler management failed to undertake the structural reorganization imposed by Henry Ford II such that within six days of his becoming president in 1945, the labour relations staff function was upgraded to a Labour Relations Department. Chrysler continued to manage resistance with a combination of top-level autocratic intransigency and

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1. Marquart, op cit, 139, an old time SP member writes: "Following Walter Reuther's complete victory in 1947, the UAW's democratic kind of factionalism was rapidly transformed into a one-party state, and the Reuther administration worked hand-in-hand with management to discipline workers." In support of his argument he quotes a statement made by George Lyons, the Education Director of Local 174, a less controversial source, 119: "I'm the education director of Walter Reuther's home local and I'm glad the Reuther group now controls the UAW. Yet I don't think it good when one group dominates the union... We no longer have the kind of democracy we once had. Our democracy is becoming more and more controlled...that's what we've got - controlled democracy." Even the somewhat apologetic 1949 offering from Irving Howe and B J Widick, op cit, detected potential problems, 263-4: "What is most disturbing about the current situation in the UAW and what constitutes the greatest possible source of bureaucratic malformation is that, for the first time in the union's history, there is no significant opposition to the leadership...The democracy of the UAW of 1935-36 is not likely to reappear in the UAW of the coming few years."

low-level managerial discretion. It was only in the mid- and late 1950s that a dramatic worsening of Chrysler's market situation forced a change in management structure and then a major reassertion of managerial power.

Chapter 10 is concerned with the complex of pressures shaping Chrysler labour relations in the post-war period: management ideology and structure, market forces, the local union tradition and international union politics. Section one focuses on the ways in which management style provided opportunities for continued worker resistance. Section two argues that Chrysler workers were able to seize the opportunities provided because their tradition of sectional bargaining was largely independent of international union pressure. Section three examines developments after 1950 as management developed a more consistent labour relations strategy of trying to force key local UAW officers to acknowledge the validity of the external regulation of workplace behavior via the increasingly detailed national contracts.

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2. O E Williamson, Markets and Hierarchies: Analysis and Antitrust Implications, (New York: The Free Press, 1975), 135, suggests stresses on the unitary form of management structure can provide "opportunities for discretion...deliberate distortion will be introduced into the hierarchical information exchange process in support of subgoals. Permissive attitudes towards slack may also develop." The book argues that under certain conditions neither product market competition nor the intervention of stockholders in the capital market will automatically correct the "discretionary outcomes" which can arise: "If, however, the firms in question enjoy some degree of monopoly in their respective markets and if, realistically, stockholders have insufficient knowledge or are otherwise indisposed to effect management displacement...a managerial discretion problem plainly exists."

I. Managerial crisis

K T Keller ran Chrysler from 1935 to 1956 as a classic centralized management autocracy. He dabbled in virtually everything, from insisting that only initials were used in the company directory to preventing the styling department from following the 1950s trend of cars with low rooflines - "We build cars to sit in, not piss over" was just one of his styling instructions.[3] The weakness inherent in this managerial style was compounded, paradoxically, by Chrysler's immediate post-war success. The explosion of demand for cars that followed World War Two allowed Chrysler to sell virtually all the cars it could turn out, and by making only a few facility changes, such as moving most of the work in the Dodge wire room from benches onto a moving conveyor, Keller found he could outproduce Ford each year from 1946 to 1949.[4] This increase in production - from 540,000 passenger cars in 1946 to 1,120,000 in 1949, shown in Figure 5 (see following page) - took Chrysler to a peak some 20% higher than the 940,000 pre-war heights of 1937 and 1940. But this success exposed Chrysler's managerial weakness: what was essentially the same management structure was managing 95,000

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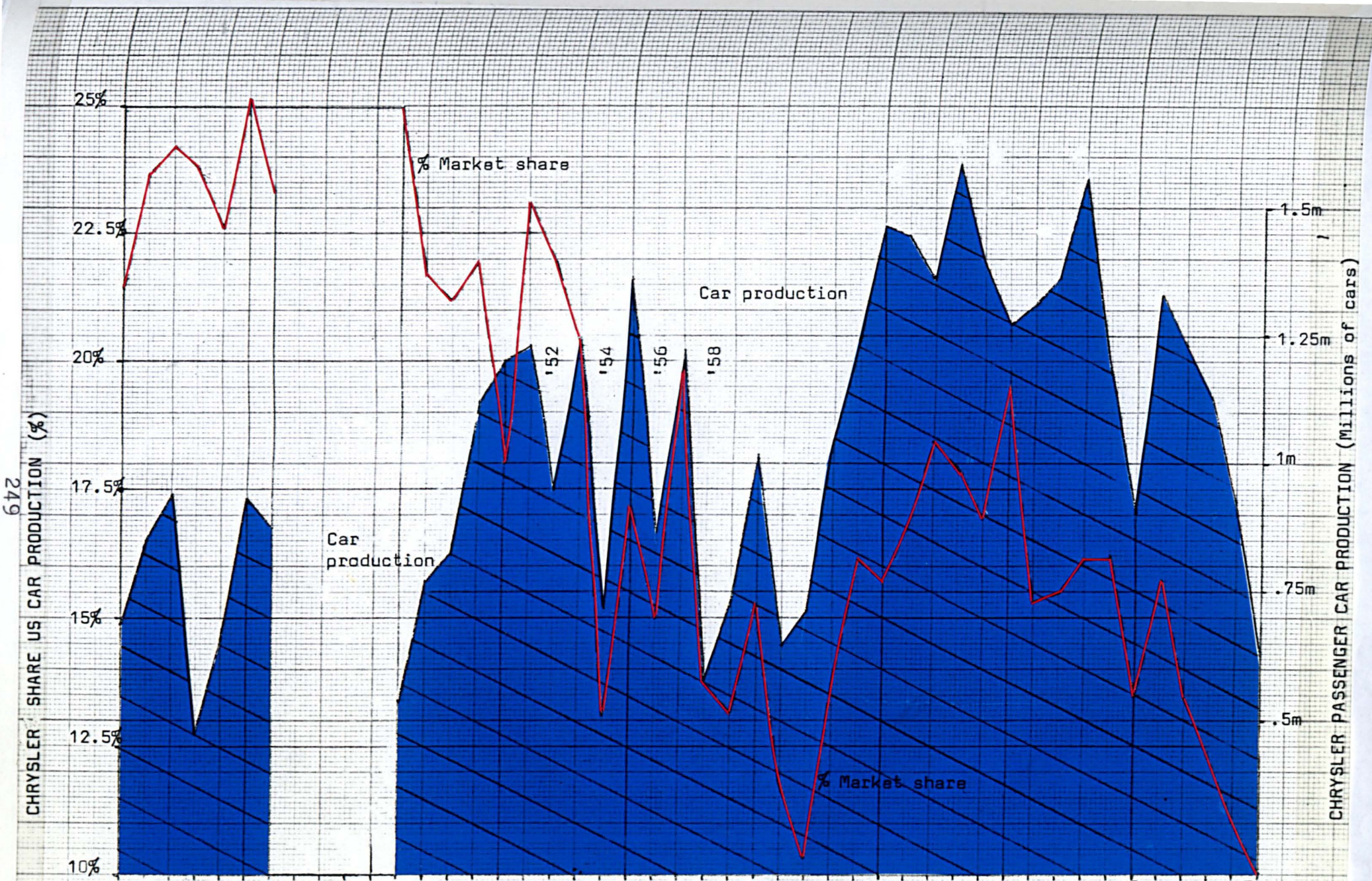
3. Stuart, op cit, 50-57; Michael Moritz and Barrett Seaman, Going for Broke: the Chrysler Story (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 47-52.

4. Stuart, op cit, 55, points to Ford's $2 billion investment on plant modernization and capacity expansion between 1946 and 1950 while Chrysler invested as little as possible; Nalezty interview; Ward's Automotive Yearbook, 1969, 79.



GRAPH 5: CHRYLSER CAR PRODUCTION AND MARKET SHARE, 1935-1980

employees in 1949, spread out over more plants and including tank production and engineers working on the atomic bomb and missile weapons systems, while in 1940 it had only organized 68,000. This rapid growth led Chrysler to exhibit symptoms of "control loss" [5] in its financial and employment policies.

Control loss

A significant area of "control loss" was dividend and investment policy. Walter Chrysler's financial right-hand man from 1920 had been B E Hutchinson, and the tradition of non-interference in "his" department was carried on after Chrysler's death in 1940. Hutchinson viewed profits as primarily the disposable income of executives and shareholders, [6] and he operated a consistently high dividend policy. Table 9 shows how he heralded the onset of a declining market share in the early 1950s by doubling the distribution of dividend payments:

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5. Williamson, op cit, 126.

6. Stuart, op cit, 52,61.

TABLE 9
CHRYSLER PRODUCTION, MARKET SHARE AND PROFITABILITY, 1930-1959

Five yearly average	Passenger car production (millions)	Car market share (%)	Return on Sales (car and non-car) (%)[a]	Dividends per share ($)
1935-39	.724	23.14	8.36	.75
1946-49	.816	22.45	7.96	.82
1950-54	1.072	19.30	6.78	1.62
1955-59	.955	15.81	2.48	.65

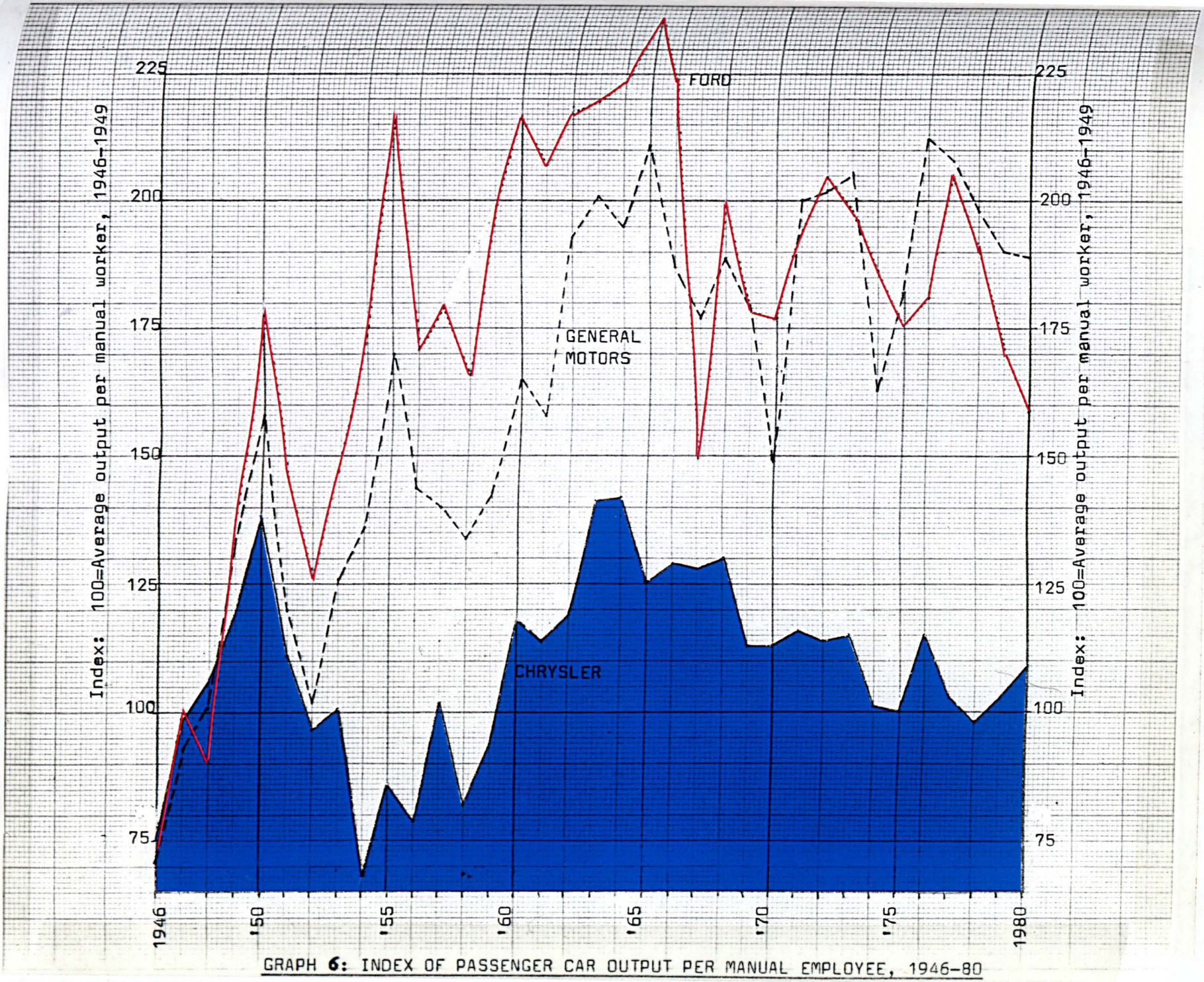
SOURCE: Ward's Automotive Yearbooks; Chrysler Corporation (1973), op cit.
NOTE: a. Before tax operating margin as a percentage of net sales.

Hutchinson strongly resisted the reinvestment of 'his' profits in new plant and equipment and as dividends soared, Chrysler stock became increasingly popular. The number of shareholders rose from 54,378 to 89,307 between 1946 and 1954,[7] but Chrysler's front-line supervision found itself increasingly reliant upon older machines and facilities.

A second area of "control loss" was in labour productivity. Chrysler's 'right to manage' was exercised under restraints maintained by the repeated use of the 'right to strike'. The crude productivity index[8] shown in Figure 6 (on next page) and in

7. Chrysler Corporation (1973), op cit, 51.

8. It is a crude index because it includes all manual workers employed by the 'Big Three', not merely those involved in passenger car production. This distorts the absolute value of the car output per worker figures, but although there were changes over time in car design which also affected productivity, the index does give a rough guide to changes over time and the comparative performance of the major manufacturers.



GRAPH **6:** INDEX OF PASSENGER CAR OUTPUT PER MANUAL EMPLOYEE, 1946-80

Table 10 of passenger car output per 'Big Three' manual worker, point to substantial differences between Chrysler, GM and Ford in the 1950s:

TABLE 10
PASSENGER CAR OUTPUT PER MANUAL EMPLOYEE AT CHRYSLER, GM AND FORD, 1946-1959

Five yearly average	Car output per manual worker Average 1946-49 = 100		
	Chrysler	General Motors	Ford
1946-49	100	100	100
1950-54	103	129	155
1955-59	89	146	186

SOURCE: Corporation data; Ward's Automotive Yearbooks.

GM's crude output per worker rose in the early 1950s by more than a quarter, and Ford's by over a half above the post-war recovery years of 1946-49, while at Chrysler output per worker only held its own and then collapsed between 1953 and 1958.

The output evidence of control loss in employment policy is supported by a comparison of Chrysler and Ford employment levels between 1946 and 1954. While Ford and Chrysler annually produced within 100,000 cars of each other from 1946 to 1954, their recruitment patterns were very different. Table 11 compares the change in Chrysler's annual average employment levels with those at Ford:

TABLE 11
CHANGES IN CHRYSLER AND FORD US EMPLOYMENT, 1946-1954

Year	CHRYSLER				FORD			
	Hourly		Salaried		Hourly		Salaried	
	(000s)	%change	(000s)	%change	(000s)	%change	(000s)	%change
1946	59.9		15.7		82.2		19.3	
1947	64.9	+ 8.9	16.0	+ 1.7	96.7	+17.6	22.7	+17.6
1948	65.3	+ .6	16.4	+ 2.5	106.0	+ 9.6	25.8	+13.7
1949	78.2	+19.7	16.7	+ 1.8	100.2	- 6.2	26.3	+ 1.9
1946-49	67.1		16.2		96.3		23.5	
1950	72.8	- 6.9	17.1	+ 2.9	112.3	+12.1	29.7	+12.9
1951	92.6	+27.1	19.2	+12.2	102.1	-10.0	34.9	+17.5
1952	82.2	-11.1	21.6	+12.1	101.9	- .2	37.9	+ 8.6
1953	103.0	+25.2	24.7	+14.4	133.6	+31.1	44.4	+17.2
1954	88.2	-14.3	27.7	+12.3	124.5	- 6.8	53.1	+ 9.9
a1950-54	87.8	+30.8	22.1	+36.2	114.9	+19.3	40.0	+70.2

SOURCE: Company data.
NOTE: a.Percentage rise of average 1950-54 over 1946-49.

Chrysler management used 30% more hourly-paid workers in the first half of the 1950s than in the late 1940s while Ford expanded its hourly paid labour force only by 20%.

The contrast in the recruitment of salaried staff was even more dramatic: Ford took on one third more salaried workers between 1946 and 1949, against a mere 6% recruitment by Chrysler; and while Chrysler recruited salaried staff more rapidly in the early 1950s, its overall expansion of these technical, supervisory, clerical and managerial workers remained only half Ford's. The result was that while Ford recruited more supervisors, engineers, planners and sales staff to alter the structure of its labour force from one salaried worker for every 4.3 hourly workers in 1946 to one for every 2.7 by 1954,

Chrysler's salaried-to-hourly structure remained virtually unchanged. It employed one salaried worker to 3.8 hourly-paid workers in 1946 and one for every 3.2 hourly-paid by 1954. In 1955, Chrysler's historic employment high, when it employed an average 132,668 hourly-paid and 32,059 salaried workers, the ratio returned to one for every 4.1.[9] Not only did Chrysler's management structure not clearly separate policy-forming from day-to-day decision-making, but by comparison with its chief rival it was critically short of salaried staff.

The "slack" in the Chrysler managerial system meant managers could and did hire new labour to raise overall output rather than attempt to raise the productivity of the existing labour force. Chrysler had overtaken Ford as the second biggest automobile manufacturer to GM in 1936. In 1950 Keller, without first balancing the costs of resistance against the cost of concession,[10] took on the UAW in a 104-day strike over pension rights, and Chrysler lost second place. It recovered temporarily in 1951 but then permanently took third place from 1952. By comparison with its rivals, Chrysler was not only under-managed, but poorly managed as well.

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9. The configuration of the Chrysler labour force differed from GM's in particular in one further significant respect: its concentration in Detroit. In July 1955, for example, 81% of its of its total labour force was based in Detroit plants; and in the recently created Automotive Body Division the concentration was even greater - 87.6%, cf: UAW Research Department Collection, WRL, Box 79.

10. Harris, op cit, 154.

Managing management

The managerial rigidity of the late 1940s and early 1950s was masked by the substantial profits generated by the high production, low investment policy. Chrysler's operating margin as a percentage of sales actually averaged a higher figure over 1949 and 1950 than it had done since the early company expansion of 1925-28. But the precipitous decline in Chrysler's share of production after 1951, from 23.1% to 13.1%, could not be covered up. Soon after he was appointed president in 1950, Colbert persuaded Keller to agree to hire management consultants, McKinsey & Company, to undertake a major study of what was going wrong.

The McKinsey report took nearly two years in depth study and then proposed major changes in virtually every area of Chrysler's management. The existing corporate structure with seven totally independent vice presidents co-ordinated merely through a twice-weekly meeting with Keller, was to be recast to allow corporate-wide strategic planning. The influence of the engineering department was to be curbed, allowing car design to be modernized. Domestic production was to be decentralized away from Detroit and Detroit's labour relations problems. Management was to ensure its new plants started to operate in the manner of Ford and GM plants, and was to plan the redrawing of the frontier of control in its existing plants to achieve the same goal. It proposed the construction of two new transmission plants, one sizeable stampings plant and three new assembly plants and, in

1953, the purchase of Briggs Body. Chrysler was also recommended to follow its competitors overseas.[11]

Knowing what should be done was not, however, the same as doing it. Although Chrysler's labour relations strategy did become more consistent in the early 1950s, this was primarily because the disastrous 1950 strike and the 1950 five year contract forced the newly-appointed president Colbert to consider the lessons. The McKinsey report did not have a major impact on Chrysler's management until major changes in top Chrysler personnel were completed: Hutchinson retired in 1953, Keller in 1956. This left 'Tex' Colbert, the lawyer turned automobile manufacturer, president and chairman of Chrysler with sufficient authority to implement the new strategy in full.

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11. Moritz and Seaman, op cit, 47, 55; Stuart, op cit, 61-62.

II. Union tradition

The relatively low number of supervisors in Chrysler plants, the greater discretion plant and departmental managers had over recruitment than their counterparts at GM and Ford, and the restrictions on new investment encouraged sectional bargaining. In this climate the independent union tradition forged in the 1930s and hardened during wartime flourished. It did so because the Chrysler workers' sectional and departmental union organization and relative autonomy within the international UAW preserved the legitimacy of the right to strike.

Steward organization

Departmental (chief) stewards and sectional (blue button) stewards co-existed at Dodge Main throughout the 1940s and 1950s. In large departments where the steward to worker ratio was very high, like the trim department with perhaps only six chief stewards on each shift representing some 4,000 workers, the blue button steward system was much more important[12] than in areas where there was a chief steward for every 30 workers. In these big departments line stewards survived at Dodge Main well after the 1950 contract when their role of dues collectors was

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12. DMN, June 1956; Edith Fox, recently elected to the publicity committee from the trim department, writes of some "40 blue buttons" on the line "a few years back".

dispensed with by the check-off system - some nine years after Ford and four years after GM.[13] The blue buttons played a key role as passers on of instructions and information when line or department strikes took place.

Blue button stewards were also the first tier of negotiators with management about production standards. Informal bargaining usually took place at model changes when management hoped to use engineering changes to reduce manning levels. The supervisors were often caught in a dilemma: if they insisted on formal procedures they would have to bring the time study man onto a new job within hours of production starting up. Their 'scientific' study would then take place before the worker had progressed along the job learning curve. On the other hand, if they wanted to fix manning levels without the assistance of the time study department, they were forced to bargain with the line stewards. It was a problem that the uncertain economic situation of the early 1950s increasingly brought to the attention of the more far-sighted members of management. Edie Fox was hired in the

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13. The role of the dues check-off in killing the (blue button) steward system in Ford and GM from 1941 and 1946 respectively, has been often commented on as the strategic move that took the guts out of the purpose of being a sectional steward. Since Ford and GM refused to negotiate with sectional stewards, after the companies collected workers' dues there was very little point left in acting as one. Writing in 1951 Irvine, op cit, 128, made a point that was more applicable to Chrysler in the longer-term. Before the check-off was introduced in the plant he was studying, each steward would have to collect between $25 and $250 a month, as the steward's constituencies varied from 15 to 211 men. "It is obvious," Irvine wrote, "that he has been relieved of an almost constant burden. Yet part of that burden was to convince the rank and file of the union that it was worth their while to pay their dues."

Dodge stock room in June 1948:

> The blue buttons were bargaining all the time. If there was a grievance they would either get the chief steward or, since you could never find the chief steward, in the interim they'd act as steward.14

Without an effective organization around him or her, a steward who took a militant line would be quickly isolated and dismissed. Chief stewards who were aware of this encouraged their blue button stewards to take on as much bargaining as the foremen would swallow. As late as the 1955 model year boom, the trim unit chairman wrote an article for the Dodge Main News called, "Tips to Blue Button Stewards on Bargaining":

> *Don't be sidetracked...
> *Keep the penal element out of the picture as much as possible...
> *Do not quarrel amongst yourselves...
> *Make sure that ALL workers know what the UNION is all about...15

Its basic rules could have applied equally to chief stewards in negotiations with foremen or superintendents.

But beneath their apparent recognition, the blue button steward's role was changing. In the late 1930s many sections regularly elected their blue buttons: they were direct representatives of the rank and file. The institutionalization of the chief steward system had changed this: blue button elections became a rarity in the 1940s. They were always appointed by the area's chief steward - and they tended to be those who had

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14. Fox interview.

15. DMN, December 11 1954.

campaigned hardest for the chief steward's election.[16] This gradually weakened the representative basis of the system - especially in the 1950s when the internal politics of the plant was dominated by right (green slate) versus left (blue slate) factional battles. Workers increasingly accepted management's view that blue buttons were less 'legitimate' than the chief stewards, and the flow of grievances upwards via the blue buttons slowly dried up.

By the mid-1950s the direct involvement of blue button stewards in negotiations with their foremen became, paradoxically, another factor responsible for their eclipse. The super-seniority and full-time negotiator status of the chief steward increasingly became for many the reason for taking on the job. From the late 1940s chief stewards started coming to work wearing a white shirt and a tie like the foremen; they were only nominally attached to a job and in certain cases management would only insist they weren't caught sleeping too often.[17] When major lay-offs began to occur cyclically every two years from 1952 to 1958, several chief stewards found they were opposed for election by workers who they themselves had appointed blue button stewards

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16. Liska interview.

17. Interview with Robert Jensen, Administrative Assistant to Marc Stepp, UAW Chrysler Vice President, April 7 1981: "It was considered so good to be a chief steward then, a lot of them wore white shirts." UAW-Chrysler, Digest, 6-15: 1949 case of Dodge Main Chief Steward Jones discharged for sleeping on the job after being disciplined for the same offence twice previously. Jones had claimed "he had sat down for a moment until other men working on a machine moved away so he could clean up. While sitting he momentarily dozed off."

and who had gained their union and negotiating experience in that job. Increasingly, they preferred not to risk creating potential rivals, and so simply failed to give out new blue buttons when existing ones dropped out, were transferred or were laid off.[18]

The Chrysler chief stewards believed in the union tradition but preferred a quiet life.[19] The 180 at Dodge Main through most of the 1950s rarely worked. Edith Fox recalled the situation in the trim and final assembly:

> Our chief stewards never worked. If they put our chief steward to work we would all stop. It was part of an established tradition: it came right out of the early years.[20]

The Dodge Main stewards were probably quite similar in background to a group of 40 Buffalo-based UAW stewards interviewed in 1950.[21] The transmission of the local union tradition from one generation to the next occurred through the blend of old and new stewards: a third had worked for between seven and fifteen years before being elected a steward and a small core had held office for between seven and twelve years. Shop-floor democracy was still very vigorous: half the sample were opposed in every election and half of them had been in

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18. Liska interview.

19. Edith Fox recalled: "By the time I started in the final assembly our chief steward had already learned not to appear."

20. Edith Fox interview. Some skilled chief stewards representing small departments would work part-time.

21. Herbert Irvine, "The UAW-CIO Shop Steward: A consideration of his role as a force for democracy" (MA thesis, University of Buffalo, 1951).

office for less than a year. The turnover was considerable - perhaps helped by the claim by a quarter of the stewards that they held frequent sectional meetings. The level of involvement in strikes by the Buffalo sample was probably considerably lower than their fellow stewards at the strike-prone Dodge Main, but it was still quite high: over three quarters had personally experienced a strike, and a third of them had actually been on strike for between 14 and 19 weeks. Nearly half had been on a picket line for a sister local and five had been on a demonstration other than a strike meeting.

Who were the Buffalo stewards? Two were college graduates and 68% of the sample had attended high school - twice the proportion of 39% of the US adult population in 1950. What did they think about unions and politics? Four times as many (24) believed business was out to break the unions as believed (8) that business accepted the unions.[22] And they did not hold significantly different views on Communism than the American public as a whole at that time: with only one exception they were in favour of barring Communists from holding office.[23] In the 1950s these stewards, like those at Dodge Main, could share the national anti-Communist ideology while their plant consciousness

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22. Their views somewhat qualify Harris' argument that by 1950 management generally had learned to live with the unions; for this was not the general experience of these stewards; Harris, op cit, Chapter 5.

23. Irvine, op cit, 109-110, 118, 145, 147, 152-3.

justified an anti-employer ideology that to the wider world represented "Communism". While anti-Communism made it very difficult for radicals to function within the labour movement, it was not impossible while the right to strike against 'unfair' management was still seen as legitimate.

The Right to Strike

The strength of Dodge Main's 'independence' from company dictates and international UAW pressure lay in Chrysler workers' belief that it was legitimate for them to respond to management's disregard of workplace-established rules by striking. At GM and Ford, by contrast, although wildcat strikes did occur from time to time, they represented a departure from the norm. The difference between Chrysler and the other auto companies did not, however, appear in the contract. Indeed, in the 1937 Chrysler contract, striking was ruled out altogether:

> The Union shall not cause or permit its members to cause, nor will any member of the Union take part in, any sit-down or stay-in strike or other stoppage in any of the plants of the Corporation during the term of this Agreement."24

Following the strike victory of 1939 the second contract acknowledged "authorized" strikes, but only after "all the bargaining procedure as outlined in this agreement has been exhausted, and in no case until after the negotations have continued for at least five days, and not even then unless

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24. UAW-Chrysler Contract, April 6 1937, Clause 4.

sanctioned by the International Union UAW of America."[25] In the sixth contract, signed in May 1950 after the 104 day strike, the 'right to strike' was once more virtually ruled out. It became an offence to strike "upon a matter on which the Appeal Board... has power to rule".[26] And that constituted virtually everything since at Chrysler between 1943 and 1955 the Appeal Board chairman could rule on production standards where the complaint was that the rate was "too fast".[27]

The constitutional 'illegality' of wildcats was clear. Yet between 1946 and 1956 Chrysler corporate headquarters recorded 1,434 unauthorized strikes. This large total did not mean that the contract provisions were irrelevant. They were available as a sanction to be used against strikers. Especially from 1950, when Chrysler management slowly shifted from its total opposition to union organization to trying to shape its union environment to its own liking, the sanctions led to a growing proportion of wildcats ending in the dismissal of those the management decided were troublemakers - although management often still conceded the point

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25. UAW-Chrysler Contract, November 29 1939, 4.

26. UAW-Chrysler Contract, May 4 1950, 6.

27. Chrysler-UAW, Digest of Umpire Decisions (Detroit: UAW, 1980 edition), 7-1,7-3. Production standards were always excluded from the umpire's jurisdiction at GM and Ford.

at issue.[28] This made the leadership aspect of a steward's job much more difficult. Stewards had to find ways of calling strikes they couldn't be disciplined for. Claiming to be doing what everyone else was doing was ruled 'no defence' as far as a steward was concerned by the umpire as early as March 1945.[29] One body-in-white steward, Steve Wisnieski, used to walk beside the body line with his hand in a particular position scratching the back of his head to give the signal. Another, Mike Kroll, always used to make sure he was in the department office talking about some trivial matter when a strike started.[30] Workers would

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28. In March 1952, for example, a few weeks after Chrysler fired two alleged "Communists" on what the umpire later decided were insufficient grounds, management fired two headliner section workers from the trim department for leading a sectional stoppage of 18 workers against the demanning of the section. Forty workers then struck in protest and the company laid off 9,000 workers and fired 22 more headliners. Their sacking provoked a Department 99 strike - and a week later the company partially backed down, reinstating the second group of 22 (there was no way it could train up that number of headliners rapidly even if it had wanted to fire them all permanently). apparently backing down on the manning issue, but leaving the first two workers fired. See Detroit Free Press, March 25 1952; Daily Worker, April 1 1952.

29. Chrysler-UAW, Digest, 2-1. Dodge Main Department 171 Chief Steward, Riley, quit early with his section when they all defied an instruction not to leave their work to wash-up before finishing. He alone was given a one day layoff and when his section walked out in protest he was dismissed for his part in that. The umpire ruled against him on March 16 1945: "Riley showed no disposition to use the machinery provided him under the Contract. He chose to substitute his own judgment as to what to do, to the judgment of the Union as set forth in the Contract...No matter how good his intention, trouble followed. Riley offered himself as a subject for discipline by disregarding the orderly procedure established under the Contract." In June 1951, after 66 final assembly workers had walked out on Friday May 28, the umpire upheld the discharge on the Monday after of a Dodge Main assembly line Chief Steward, his alternate and the section's blue button steward. They had walked out after being given smocks but not the overalls they demanded for working in the pits beneath the cars, and after the dismissals the 10,000 workers on the afternoon shift refused to cross a picket set up by 50 of the final assembly workers; Detroit Free Press, May 29 1951. The umpire ruled, Chrysler-UAW, Digest, 2-3: "All knew of the coverall dispute, and must be credited with knowledge of the grievance procedure. All must be credited with knowing of the Union's obligation regarding unauthorized strikes. No substantial showing has been made that they counseled against the strike, its enlargement, or its continuance. None of them faced up to the responsibility which was theirs."

30. Liska interview.

often carry out the steward's wishes by going slow, refusing to work overtime, leaving to wash-up early or sitting-down on the job, without the formality of a meeting that could lay the steward open to discipline. And, as an extra-legal protection, the foreman would have to know that if a steward was fired his section and possibly the whole department would walk out in the steward's defence, making dismissal a costly procedure for the company. The strike weapon was used most regularly to limit management's interference with the straight seniority rotas and to defend workers disciplined for maintaining 'fair' production standards.

On Wednesday November 30 1949, the Dodge Main paint shop foreman, Simmons, called back some lower seniority workers while older ones were still laid off, saying, "he would not call back in 100 men when all he wanted was a dozen or so sanders". The result was a 10 am walk-out to a union meeting where the whole paint shop decided to strike. The decision was particularly difficult because the unemployment benefit of those laid off was automatically stopped if a strike broke out. But it was taken - and soon afterwards Simmons' superiors backed down. The Dodge Main News headlined the victory: "Attempts to Break Seniority Smashed. Company backs down in face of militant action". And the report ended: "Unionism, Solidarity and Militancy does pay

off".[31]

A 'fair' production standard was another part of Dodge Main's plant consciousness during the 1940s and early 1950s. What this actually meant on the shop floor is very difficult to reconstruct. Jobs changed, sometimes every year; the technology changed, usually more slowly; and management production targets changed, often from week to week. But many, if not most workers worked on jobs where it was possible either to get ahead of the production target or to 'double up' with another worker so as to provide extra relief time. As one worker wrote of conditions in the body-in-white in 1949:

> We ran the job just as we saw fit and worked 40 or 45 minutes each hour. We'd get production ahead and then sit down to talk or rest or kid around. We never worked more than 45 minutes out of an hour, and sometimes, only 35.32

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31. DMN, December 10 1949. The following year a carbon-copy incident repeated itself in the trim shop at a time when 18,000 of the 32,000 Dodge Main workforce was laid off. This time it was the new Chrysler President, L T Colbert, who intervened to instruct lower-level management to adhere to strict departmental seniority as both production and Chrysler's market share looked in good shape for a recovery from the doldrums of 1950. The new Local 3 president, Reuther supporter Art Grudzen, interpreted Colbert's appointment and intervention as an indication that Chrysler now fully endorsed the union presence in its plants. He wrote, DMN, December 23 1950: "After about 14 years of continual struggling, fighting and bickering to make supervision and management understand that the Dodge Plant was operating under Union conditions, apparently, THE CHRYSLER CORPORATION HAS FINALLY ACCEPTED OUR UNION.. The new attitude came in when Vice President Herman Weckler went out of the labour-relations picture in Chrysler...The efforts of one man in Chrysler management has had a profound effect in bringing about this new era. That man is Ted Colbert, former President of Dodge and now President of Chrysler Corporation." This eulogy for Colbert reflected Reuther's appreciation of Colbert's agreement in December 1950 to redraw the bitterly-contested May 1950 contract in the light of the new five year contracts signed at GM and Ford. And it drew an immediate criticism from Jimmy Solomon, the Trim Shop and Plant Committee chairman, anxious to make it plain that direct action had won the victory rather than Colbert's magnanimity, ibid, January 20 1951: "At NO time did the officers come in and tell Mr Johnson (the Dodge Labour Relations chief) in no uncertain terms that the union was insisting on straight seniority."

32. C.Denby, Indignant Heart: Testimony of a Black American Worker (First published 1952; London: Pluto, 1978), 124.

One of the first women transferred to the final assembly line in 1949 recalled:

> The conditions on the assembly line, to me learning it, were really tough. But the standards were pretty much decided by the workers on the job. We would decide how much we could do. There was only one company time study man in the plant, so we didn't see much of him.
>
> We didn't have any relief - and we wanted it that way. We made our own relief. Without jeopardizing my job I could make 15 minutes for myself every hour. The foremen knew what was going on. But there was time to do good quality work.33

Ed Liska, who returned to the body-in-white in 1946 after five years in the Army, recalled standards being very slack at least until the 1950s. "We had people just reading books, sitting down," he said. "We had enough manpower to do anything."[34]

How did they secure these conditions? Gertrude Nalezty remembered workers' readiness to sit down and refuse to work as a common bargaining practice:

> Most of the time people just sat down and wouldn't work until they got what they wanted. For a while this was a real militant bunch at Dodge Main and they really stuck together. Management tried to get us to speed up. Some cases they got more work. Other cases the workers banded together and upped production to where they thought it was fair.35

In the final assembly it wasn't sit-down strikes that were most common, but slow-downs, "falling back down the line":

> If any work was added the workers would just go back down the line. We would just keep it up. To maintain control, we just didn't do the extra work. Generally the workers won. When I started on the final assembly in 1949 it was really unheard of to have a worker fired for a production standard dispute. Sometimes they would draw a line by the side of the line and if we fell back to that point then they would discipline or fire us. But if anyone was fired everyone would walk out. It only began to happen a lot in the late 1950s.36

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33. Interview by author with Edith Fox, April 20 1981.

34. Interview by author with Ed Liska, July 21 1982.

35. Nalezty interview. She remembered one such incident: "Management tried to get us to wear laundered gloves. The workers just refused to use them. Those who couldn't work without gloves just spent half an hour sitting down and then got their new gloves."

Sectional action, or the threat to use it was the answer.

In December 1949 time study men set a rate of 640 pieces on the heavy gear case job in Department 107, the Dodge Main transmission unit. The three workers, one on each shift, were turning out only an average 513 at the time, but under pressure raised this to 540. In the steadily deteriorating labour relations atmosphere that existed just prior to the 104-day national Chrysler strike, they were given one-day disciplinary lay-offs just before Christmas. Eighty fellow workers stayed off with them. Then, in January 1950, when they persisted in their 'go-slow', management suspended them again - for two days. The whole transmission unit then walked out at 9 am to a meeting in the Local 3 hall and decided to strike until the management backed down. The EB, to the surprise of the transmission unit chief steward, informally supported the strike,[37] and management quickly backed down, discovering "they may be wrong in the fatigue time they allow".[38] Foremen and superintendents had considerable autonomy from higher management as to how they ran

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36. Fox interview.

37. The Bartelbort regime of 1949-50 was a centre faction that opposed Reuther from a parochial, Dodge Main standpoint. In January 1950, just before the national UAW strike began the EB was keen to publicize Chrysler's evil deeds - and this was why it gave space to John Hudak to write up the strike in the Dodge Main News.

38. Detroit Times, December 21 1949; DMN, January 28 1950.

their departments as long as they kept production flowing. So considerable bargaining strength remained with the work group on the shop floor. The 'fair' production standard[39] was maintained by the right to strike. Only when the right to strike was no longer a legitimate activity in the eyes of most Dodge workers was management able to regain its authority over standards.

Local 3 politics

The tradition of local union autonomy at Dodge Main came under increasing pressure from the international after the consolidation in power of the Reuther faction in 1947. But from 1945 to 1948, and from 1949 to 1951, although the presidents of Local 3 were Reuther supporters, the international's attempts to assert control over wildcat strikes at Dodge Main failed. The local union tradition was still too resilient to be handled in a period when management was overtly hostile to all union activity. Only when Chrysler management began to practise a more civilized relationship with the international, in the first half of the 1950s, did the international's influence come to count for a lot

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39. The "fair" production standard was embodied in UAW policy by the IEB on April 28 1949: "The UAW-CIO...insists that reduction in the unit cost of production must be made possible by improving technology and production processes, and by efficient engineering and management, and not by placing an unfair load on workers... It is our policy to authorize strike action in any plant, large or small, big corporation or small shop, when the facts show that an employer is attempting to drive his workers to make them produce more than a fair day's work." Reproduced in Spotlight: Special Chrysler Bulletin, March 1957.

on Joseph Campau Avenue.[40]

Mike Novak was re-elected Local 3 President every year on a pro-Reuther ticket until 1949 when he took a job with the international. During his period of office, Dodge Main, like all the other Detroit Chrysler plants, had shut down completely in the April 24 1947 strike against the Taft-Hartley Bill.[41] And when Reuther decided to comply with the anti-Communist provisions of the Act, including the swearing of non-Communist affidavits by all candidates for local union positions,[42] Local 3 fell in line. Local 3 had also backed Reuther in first toying with the idea of labour supporting an independent presidential candidate in 1948, and then, when Reuther changed his mind, in plumping for Truman and the Democrat Party.[43] The year 1948 was the high point for

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40. The tension between the international and the Chrysler locals was, of course, noted by the Corporation which initiated a new attempt to place restrictions on the steward system in the major contract battle of 1950. Dodge Local 3 Collection, WRL, Box 9. Undated letter "To all Chrysler workers" from Norman Matthews and Victor Reuther on the 1950 settlement: "It was not until the 99th day of the strike that the Corporation withdrew from its position on this issue (limitations on the steward system) and agreed to continue the steward system intact." Indeed, Chrysler was only successful in securing UAW agreement to first consider and then implement changes in the system in 1961 and 1964, after the shop floor defeats of 1957-59; see below, p .

41. DMN, April 19, May 3 1947.

42. See Non-Communist Affidavits in Dodge Local 3 Collection, WRL. Certain left stewards may have avoided completing these affidavits until it became an issue. Thus Edith Van Horn, the wire room chief steward who was dismissed by Chrysler on March 3 1952 after she was named as a Communist in the House Un-American Committee hearings in Detroit, only swore a non-Communist affidavit herself on March 10; Local 3 Collection, evidence to umpire.

43. DMN, August 9 1947, contained a report from the Local 3 delegation to the Wayne County CIO Convention on its endorsement of Henry A Wallace for President by the delegation's secretary, Edith Van Horn; in 1948, however, Van Horn resigned as Local 3 Political Action Committee chairperson because she continued to support Wallace while the Local EB went for Trueman, see: The Wage Earner, March 1950.

the Dodge right-wing. They swept the board in the February 1948 elections, finally removing John Zaremba from the local Executive Board on which he had sat since 1936.[44] These post-war political changes in Local 3's leadership are represented in Figure 7 on the following page.

Within a year of the rout of the left, the Local 3 leadership were in disarray: anti-Communism could cement an alliance on the UAW's IEB, but not necessarily sustain one in a plant where the left were no serious threat. Once a strong personality like Novak was out of Dodge Main, the right-wing split. Novak's closest supporters campaigned on a Green slate around Art Grudzen that got the support of Reuther and the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists (ACTU):

Think Right - Be Right - Vote right
Vote the Grudzen-Reuther slate for
Pensions, Health Insurance, Job Security
Living Wage
Your Job Depends on
Good Leadership[45]

But they were opposed by a centre "Trade Union" slate around 'Big Ed' Bartelbort from the machine shop and Ed Domanski from the

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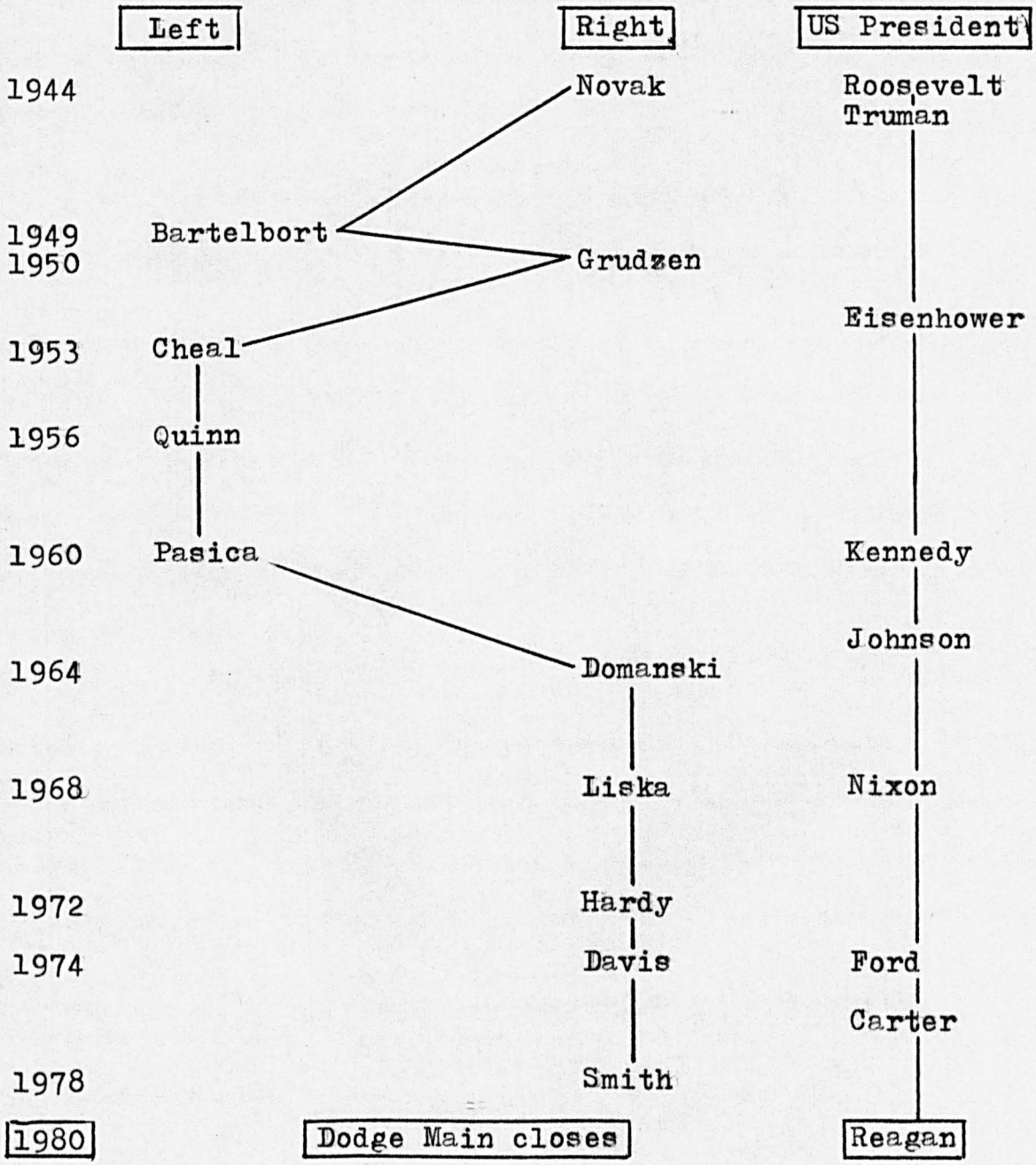
44. The post-war resurgence of the Dodge Main right-wing was due in part to the alienation of Dodge workers from the anti-strike policy of the Thomas-Addes-CP wartime UAW leadership, and in part because of the large numbers of politically very right-wing Poles who emigrated to Hamtramck as wartime Displaced Persons after the Russian occupation of Poland. As early as April 1945 Zaremba complained to Addes about the role of extreme right-wing Poles on a Polish American Council [opposed to the UAW's American Polish Labour Council] who, "with the aid of the Reuther Brothers...are causing disruption among the Polish workers"; Addes Collection, WRL, Box 107, File 17, letter dated April 5 1945.

45. Ross Collection, WRL, Box 3; Green slate election card, February 1949.

FIGURE 7

Political Sympathies
of
Local 3 Presidents



body-in-white. They campaigned to re-open the two year contract signed after a 16-day strike in May 1948:[46]

Pensions
CIO policy
Revision of contract 47

The lack of clear political differences between these two slates was brought out by the Zaremba-Van Horn left slate of "Fighting leaders for a More Progressive Union":

30c hourly wage raise
Pensions and health insurance program at company expense
All out fight against speed-up
Halt to discrimination in hiring and on the job against Negroes, women and workers over 35
Complete, honest repeal of Taft-Hartley 48

The black foundry steward who had played a key role in preventing a return-to-work movement developing in 1939, Curtis Davis, ran for treasurer on this left slate. They got nowhere, but the widespread feeling among Chrysler workers that they had been sold short with the 13c rise negotiated in 1948 led to the election of the Bartelbort slate.[49]

Bartelbort had started at Dodge Main in 1934 and was first elected chief steward for department 108 in 1943. He had been elected machine shop division plant committeeman in 1946 and represented the "good sound American unionism" that dominated the

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46. Harvard Business School, 1948 Contract Negotiations between Chrysler Corporation and the UAW, (Harvard: 1948), 17-18.

47. Ross Collection, WRL, Box 3

48. ibid

49. DMN, March 26 1949, claimed it was the biggest turnout ever in a Dodge Local 3 election.

activists' consciousness. But in 1948 he was not for Walter Reuther,[50] so by definition he was seen as being against. During the 104 day strike between January and May 1950 the voting strength of the Dodge Main delegation to the Chrysler Conference was cut from 201 to 12, although it represented one third of the 89,000 strikers.[51] This followed a protest by the Chrysler stewards' council against Reuther's decision to allow maintenance and other workers into the plant during the strike.[52]

At the first Dodge Main stewards' council meeting following the strike, Art Hughes, the former war-time opponent of the

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50. The alienation of the Local from the International was confirmed in August 1949 when the Executive Board and PAC endorsed Dick Frankensteen for Mayor of Detroit as against Reuther's nominee, former SP member George Edwards. It took this stance after learning that Frankensteen's refusal to stand down had led to Reuther sacking Don Frankensteen (Dick's brother) after 13 years as the UAW's Chief Auditor; DMN, August 8, 20 1949.

51. DMN, February 18 1950.

52. UAW Local 3 Collection, WRL, Recording Secretary's files, Stewards' Council minutes, January 24 1950. Several accounts describe the passivity of the 1950 strike. The Reporter, April 25 1950, for example wrote: "A strange strike. Instead of keeping morale up by mass picketing, the locals left that problem to the radio and recreation divisions and the counselling service." Irvine, op cit, wrote, 84: "While the strike meant heavy losses in wages to the men and hardships of many kind, it was a completely different type of strike than those of 1937-39. Control of the strike never left the hands of the top leadership. Picket lines were either not had or very sparsely mounted. The 89,000 workers supported the strike from start to finish. There was no back to work movement, no bloodshed, no violence of any kind." The undoubted passivity arose out of several different factors: the much tighter control by the Reuther faction than during previous strikes meant it was conducted their way; this was the first UAW strike where strike relief was provided for the strikers - amounting to $1.1 million at Dodge Main; the strike itself was primarily over the funding of pensions, not directly for more tangible aims; and Chrysler management itself recognized for the first time that it was not possible to generate a back-to-work movement with any chance of success. Despite these factors making for a lack of participation in the strike, a mass picket at Dodge Main on Friday April 14 drew 10,000 Dodge workers, DMN, April 22 1950. Irvine's conclusion from the 1950 strike, overstates the case, 86: "The leadership has established a thoroughgoing control in the realm of collective bargaining and strikes, greatly limiting the initiative of secondary leaders and the rank and file itself in these matters"

No Strike Pledge,[53] presented the UAW case for curbing unauthorized strikes. Grudzen used the occasion to open his campaign for office, the elections having been delayed by the strike. His was a very careful balancing act. He supported the IEB but continued to acknowledge the justice of responding to what Dodge workers saw as infringements on their 'rights':

> I want you to know that I am in accord with the International policy on unauthorized strikes. When a group of workers take the law into their own hands and walk off the job without following the democratic procedure of the by-laws of Local No 3 and the Constitution of the International Union, they are often, actually, doing a disservice to our Local Union...
>
> I wish to emphasize that I am not speaking of the many unauthorized strikes that are brought about by the arbitrary, dictatorial attitude and sometimes deliberate provocation of many by supervision and plant management. These situations we must fight when and where we find them.54

Opposed to, and a defender of, unauthorized strikes, Grudzen won the president's job primarily because the Bartelbort administration was already in trouble. The battle fatigue that had set in during the five months' strike, the probably accurate rumours that Bartelbort had mishandled the strike finances, and the emergence of a rival centre-left 'Blue Slate' from among Bartelbort's own supporters allowed Grudzen and one other Reuther supporter[55] to be elected in July 1950.

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53. See Chapter 9 above.

54. DMN, May 13 1950.

55. Ross Collection, WRL, Box 3; a July 1950 Green Slate leaflet asked: "Were you satisfied with the way the $1,500,000 of welfare checks were dished out during the last 100 day strike? Was there a confirmed welfare set up in our Local, or was it a political patronage depot?"

Grudzen's first speech as Local 3 President reflected the contradictory character of right-wing Dodge unionism. Grudzen was a Reuther supporter whose election address promised "responsible leadership in the settlement of the workers' grievances without resorting to 'wild-cat' strikes".[56] Yet Chrysler management made this an extremely difficult if not impossible task. It continued to deny the international union organization the public recognition and private wheeler-dealer relationship which, by the early 1950s, the UAW was accustomed to receiving from GM and Ford. In 1952, Chrysler attorney Theodore Iserman still used the language of anti-unionism when he testified before a Senate labour committee:

> The obvious answer (is to limit) the monopolistic powers of labour unions as much as we do the monopolistic powers of business.
>
> We should forbid great international unions to control the bargaining throughout an entire industry, require them to restore bargaining powers to Local unions, or other constituent units, each of which would represent employees of a single company and its subsidiaries and would be autonomous in its bargaining and striking. And we should forbid these units to combine and conspire among themselves, directly or indirectly, or to strike in concert.57

This continuing vocal hostility to the UAW meant it was not much of an advantage to be a Reuther supporter as Dodge president. Against the backcloth of the Korean War, Grudzen was forced to balance "responsibility" with the language of mobilization:

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56. ACTU Collection, WRL, Box 23; Grudzen-Szymanski Green slate leaflet.

57. Detroit Times May 22 1952.

I stand four square behind President Phillip Murray of the CIO in supporting President Truman and our Armed Forces in the struggle which appears close at hand...

Most of the unauthorized work stoppages have been and are caused by the Chrysler Corporation's refusal to directly negotiate with the union on a problem, preferring to hide behind the delayed action of the umpire procedure.

So our big job in the coming year must be in the day to day negotiations. We must continue the fight to make the Chrysler Corporation bargain with our stewards, plant committee and officers on our plant problems and use the impartial umpire only as a court of last resort in fewer and fewer cases, as it was always intended.58

He found he could not openly break with the sectional bargaining and problem-solving which Local 3 members believed were 'legitimate'. He was even forced to defend many of the unauthorized strikes in the last half of 1950:

I caution those members who may unthinkingly blame their fellow-members for plant shut-downs; get the facts first, before jumping to the same conclusions that most newspapers do, that union workers are always at fault.

Only a small number of unauthorized strikes have been caused by the workers, and your union has taken active steps to eliminate them.

After all, I consider my most important responsibility is to keep you working every minute, until you, by your democratic ballot, decide to stop work as a group.59

Chrysler management entered the 1950s with a major problem: even "responsible" unionists in its plants spoke the language of confrontation.

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58. DMN, August 5 1950.

59. DMN, October 7 1950.

III. The early 1950s: changes

As long as top management remained firmly antiunion, its lower echelons were caught between the pressure to produce and the need to accommodate to the strong union tradition among Chrysler workers. The result was that labour relations were conducted by intuition: on the one hand sectional and departmental shop floor bargaining flourished; and on the other top management insisted on two bitter national confrontations with the UAW in 1948 and 1950. After 1950, the considerable impact of the national five year contract combined with a more professional managerial approach to labour relations gradually established greater consistency. But it was certainly not smooth progress towards an accommodation with labour; nor was it the work of a sophisticated management control strategist.

Hundred-day strike

The first signs of a new, more considered management labour relations strategy appeared after Chrysler's disastrous intransigence during the four month 1950 strike. The strike was over the UAW's demand that Chrysler guarantee to pay a $100 a month pension to workers aged 65 under a scheme such that if federal social security benefits went up, so would the worker's

total entitlement. Previously, Chrysler's liability had fallen when federal benefits were increased. To underwrite the new scheme the UAW also called on Chrysler to pay 10c an hour per worker into a properly administered pension fund.[60] But Keller refused to negotiate. He was determined to demonstrate that Chrysler would not be pushed around by the UAW. After Chrysler workers had spent four months on strike, Reuther came under growing pressure to retreat. For the first time the UAW had paid strike benefit to its Chrysler members; and on May 29 negotiations were due to begin with GM. Chrysler, too, had been hit hard: it estimated a sales loss of $1bn.[61] While GM and Ford car sales in 1950 jumped 38% and 47% respectively over 1949, Chrysler's only moved up 8%. For Chrysler this was disastrous: in 1949 Ford had produced the same number of cars as Chrysler, but the loss of three months' production could not be made up, and in 1950 Ford made and sold four cars for every three of Chrysler's.[62] Keller's obduracy did not even result in a major defeat for the UAW. The outcome was a contract stalemate: Chrysler did not agree to adjust benefits above the $100, but it did agree to a establish a special pension fund. The exhaustion of both sides also expressed itself in their agreement to extend the contract for an unprecedented three-year term.[63] The 'one hundred day'

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60. Economist, February 4 1950.

61. ibid, May 13 1950.

62. Chrysler, Facts.

63. Economist, May 13 1950.

strike triggered significant changes in top management: Keller tried to cover up his responsibility by putting 'Tex' Colbert into the Chrysler president position and giving him more executive power than that post had previously possessed.

Five year contract

Within weeks it was clear the Chrysler strike had been a major managerial misjudgement. The principle of non-interference by the UAW in actuarial matters that Keller had sacrificed 500,000 cars to defend was conceded by GM after a week of talks. GM agreed to pay its pension obligations on top fo the federal benefits - giving workers $117 a month; to establish a properly-funded pension scheme; to pay a 50% disability pension to workers injured in its plants; and to pay half of workers' admission fees to the Blue Cross and Blue Shield medical care schemes. The best publicised feature of this "Treaty of Detroit", as it was called, was its five-year term coupled with a cost-of-living bonus whose downward movement was limited to 3c an hour, and a guaranteed annual rise of 4c an hour.[64] For Keller the GM settlement was a bitter pill to swallow - although the benefits promised of stable industrial relations over the next five years were highly appealing. So only seven months after the May 1950 strike settlement, it was Colbert who contacted the UAW for new negotiations and quickly signed a five-year contract that

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64. ibid, June 3 1950.

mirrored GM's. Colbert was determined Chrysler should benefit from the more orderly labour relations system operating in GM, and the December 1950 contract marked the start of a "pattern-bargaining" process that lasted until 1979, in which the 'Big Three' gave almost identical benefits to all their UAW workers.

The long-term contract helped regulate Chrysler's labour relations in several important ways. It provided an unprecedented degree of certainty about future wage costs, and so encouraged management to look at how to exercise control over labour productivity. The pattern-bargaining process gave Chrysler a direct incentive to catch up with the level of managerial control operated in its competitors' plants. And the 1950 contract also provided more assurance of opposition to unauthorized strikes by the international than Chrysler had ever had before. This, too, acted to focus attention upon the shop floor organization in its plants. Chrysler was aware that the existing tradition would be extremely difficult to crack as long as the whole union organization, from the local president and plant committee chairman down, openly supported sectional industrial action. It therefore used the five- year period of peace with the international to insist on the external regulation of the actions of top-level UAW representatives in its plants.

At Dodge Main, the targets for management's push to secure the honouring of the contract by local officers, plant committee

members and chief stewards included both supporters and opponents of the Reuther regime in the UAW and its policy of contract-legality. After his 1950 election victory, Grudzen's discomfort as a prisoner of a non-Reutherite EB and the disunity of the right-wing in Dodge were the subject of an ACTU report in May 1951:

> What appears to be a split is more of a continuation of the slow disintegration of the right-wing caucus that was never too strong to begin with. The trouble seems to be a lack of leadership - at present the caucus has just two members who are local officers, Grudzen and Schuk - they have a voice but no vote.65

But this diagnosis of the right's problem of having "a voice but no vote" was only partially true. The local president had a great deal of influence, particularly if he could pick up the telephone and get the automatic backing of the UAW's Chrysler Department. When the Department 123 'smocks' walkout took place at the end of May 1951, and three stewards were sacked, "the Dodge Local Executive Board took the position that no strike existed and asked all workers to report on their regular shift."[66] Grudzen argued:

> We could have won that grievance without losing time from work if cooler heads had prevailed. And when I say that, I mean among both Union and Management Personnel.67

On June 14, five days after this Dodge Main News article appeared,

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65. Association of Catholic Trade Unionists Collection, WRL, Box 23; Dodge Notes, May 23 1951.

66. DMN, June 2 1951. See note 86 on p172 above.

67. DMN, June 9 1951.

management seized upon the division in the union ranks. Clarence Johnson, the Dodge Labour Relations Director, issued a threat to Local 3 officers and plant committee members that he would take "drastic" action to end unauthorized walk-outs.[68]

Management's threat was immediately denounced in the Dodge Main News by Alfred MacNeil, a militant Catholic steward in the paint unit, Department 91:

> May I remind our International Officers and the Officers of the Corporation that it was, in a large part, due to these so-called 'wild-cat strikes' that our UAW-CIO was built...We are not in Russia, and as free Americans we will not tolerate Dictatorship by either the Chrysler Corporation or our International.69

But Grudzen remained silent and with sales of the 1951 models falling off, management launched its offensive. At the end of June two blue button stewards were fired when a shortage of bumpers made a stoppage not unwelcome - and when the section returned after a protest strike their chief steward was fired for not preventing it.[70]

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68. DMN, June 23 1951.

69. DMN, June 23 1951. McNeil, a Scot, reported in the DMN on October 20 1951 on a big Catholic service that took place at the Briggs (Detroit Tigers) stadium, writing: "Religion is the answer to Communism". He was defeated as a chief steward in the 1952 election, but was elected to the Local 3 Publicity Committee as paint shop representative, writing regular paint shop reports. He was one of the founders of the 1957 'Rank and File' caucus; see Chapter 11.

70. DMN, June 6 1951, reported one of the blue button stewards was fired for swearing when he was told the first one was being dismissed.

An important dismissal

These dismissals were just a warming-up exercise. On July 24 1951, a turning point in Dodge labour relations took place when Chrysler fired Jimmy Solomon. As plant committee chairman and a committeeman for the largest of Dodge Main's six divisions, the trim unit and wire room, since 1942, he was a key figure in the Dodge union organization. Solomon was fired in circumstances which led many activists to believe the UAW's "top leaders, it seems, are 'involved' with the auto corporations".[71] The supervision in the trim department had imposed new production standards, and then given two-day penalty suspensions to a team of two workers on the seat cushion line for not reaching a new output target.[72] The first and the second shifts on their line walked out and pickets appeared at the plant gates before the 6 a.m. shift the following morning. No-one crossed the picket line and the whole plant shut down. Grudzen and the EB, under pressure from the international to end the wildcat, immediately called a mass meeting to hear the international reps, Arthur Hughes and Harold Julian, argue that the issue should be taken through the grievance procedure. It was attended by about 3,000 workers mainly from other areas of the plant since most trim department workers stayed at home, and those present voted to follow the international's advice. Grudzen then ordered the

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71. DMN, September 15 1951.

72. Seven zig-zag springs an hour instead of five.

removal of the pickets and the stoppage ended.[73] A vote of the whole plant had been used to force the cushion line to accept new standards.

Five days later, Chrysler followed up its advantage. It refused to allow the two men to work at the old production standard while their grievance went through procedure and sacked them for not working to the new work schedule. Both shifts on their line stopped again, and Solomon then followed the normal practice of calling a mass meeting to consider their next move. Chrysler, clearly aware that Grudzen had advised him against this, promptly fired Solomon. Once again pickets shut down the plant but this time Grudzen failed to convince a mass meeting to return to work. Three days later, a very noisy meeting of 11,000 workers, agreed to go back on condition that the EB would immediately organize a strike vote so the plant could stop officially. This turned out to be the finish of Solomon. One steward believed internal union disunity caused the vote to go back: "the stench of the Right and Left Wing Factions have finally reached the nostrils of the membership."[74]

It was early November 1951 and lay-offs and short time working were in force before Grudzen finally called a strike

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73. Detroit News, July 19 1951.

74. DMN, August 11 1951.

vote: 11,691 workers voted, but the majority for a strike was less than the two thirds required by the UAW constitution. Solomon was out for good.[75] By proving it could dismiss the plant committee chairman (previously only done to the AIWA in 1935 and in the recession of 1939[76]), Chrysler forced every steward to act with greater caution.

Plant committeemen and chief stewards had been taught a significant lesson by the international's cooperation with the management. The consolidation of the Reuther faction in office and the signing of the five-year contracts removed any remaining ambiguity about the international's attitude towards locally-generated stoppages: it was now publicly and privately committed to bringing the strike weapon under its exclusive control.

One immediate consequence of Solomon's successful victimization was the dismissal in March 1952 of one of his chief supporters, wire room day shift chief steward, Edith Van Horn. She was fired for distributing leaflets and holding meetings in the rest room to attack the Detroit hearings of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) after she was named as a "Red". Her

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75. DMN, November 3 1951. After the vote Solomon was voted onto the local payroll by a Local 3 business meeting until such time as he would be reinstated. This, of course, never happened and in June 1953 after Solomon made his peace with Reuther, he was taken on the International staff; DMN, June 26 1953. The two Trim Shop cushion builders fired were reinstated by the umpire on January 9 1952 without pay for the period of lay-off on the argument that "to discharge two employees and not inflict any penalty on others indicates an unbalance"; Chrysler-UAW, Digest, 2-4.

76. See Chapters 4 and 7 above.

dismissal was followed by a walk-out of virtually all the wire room workers - a reaction quite unlike what had happened to another leftist Paul Henley, the Friday before. He had been subpoenaed to appear before the HUAC and had pleaded the Fifth Amendment. When he returned to the Dodge Foundry, he was physically threatened by other workers and was escorted from the plant by security guards. The next day leaflets were given out at the plant gate attacking the witch-hunt against Henley. When he returned again to his job other workers refused to work with him and Chrysler then fired him for "violating the long-established rule against inflammatory and objectionable literature in the plant".

In Henley's and Van Horn's case, however, the NLRB umpire ruled some three months later that Chrysler had not respected its own "legality". It had no evidence that Henley had distributed the leaflets, and had never previously warned Van Horn against distributing them. Both were reinstated, Henley with back pay, Van Horn without.[77] These rulings were virtually unique during the Korean War. At that time employers who dismissed workers because of the unrest caused by their political views were upheld in 80%

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77. Caute, op cit, 373.

of the cases arbitrated.[78] The reasons the NLRB acted differently at Dodge Main were complex: there remained considerable support for Van Horn in the wire room and it was possible there could be another walkout; Chrysler had not prepared its case well, charging both with specific offences of which they were both innocent; neither Chrysler nor the UAW believed there was a serious 'Red' problem in Dodge Main; and the credibility of the whole umpire system was still weak in Detroit and would not be helped by blatant disregard of the legalities. So these reinstatements played a part in shaping Dodge Main's labour relations. Something of a cause celebre they legitimized those in Dodge who were echoing the international's message to take grievances to the umpire. In the 1940s umpire decisions were overwhelmingly against Local 3: a crude breakdown shows 39 clear rulings against Local 3 and only 14 in favour from 1943 to 1949. But as Chrysler's labour relations strategy moved away from simple union-bashing in the 1950s, so umpire decisions began to reflect more balance: from 1950 to 1959 there were only 16 against to 13 in favour of Local 3.[79] The umpire system had to be legitimated as a source of 'fairness' and 'justice' in workers' experience as well as on

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78. Chrysler-UAW, Digest. 6-20,21; DMN, March 29 1952. Nalezty claimed that when Van Horn was out of the plant, the wire room voted one of the three most vociferous anti-Communists, a woman called Catherine, to take over her job as chief steward. She failed dismally to do the job, so Gertrude Nalezty was elected in her place, and when Edith Van Horn returned to the Wire Room, Nalezty moved over to become afternoon shift steward to allow Van Horn to take up her position as day shift steward again; Nalezty interview.

79. Analysis of Chrysler-UAW, Digest, Dodge Main decisions.

paper before it could offer a genuine alternative to industrial action.

Local politics

The growing acceptance of contract-legality was threatened in 1953 when frustration with the 1950 contract erupted. Unauthorized strikes broke out across the auto industry,[80] fuelled principally by the discontent of skilled workers with the long-term contract. They had seen the Korean war boom send wages and overtime rocketing in the open shops not bound by the auto industry pattern, and many skilled men joined the breakaway Independent Skilled Trades Confederation.[81] In Dodge Main, the anti-Reuther 'Blue Slate' won every position in the local elections. The skilled plant committeeman, Joe Cheal, defeated Art Grudzen to become president, and the veteran Pat Quinn was elected vice president.[82] When Dodge Main employment fell below the June 1953 record of 32,000, management responded with a new hard-line attitude, confident the local officers wouldn't be supported by the international. So in August, the Cheal administration called a strike vote, arguing that Chrysler had torn up the traditional

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80. See Figures 1 and 2 [Chapter 2] for the 1953 upturn in GM's strike frequency and especially in its unauthorized strike loss ration.

81. Anderson and Jefferys, op cit, Chapter 9.

82. Detroit Free Press, June 20 1953; Detroit Times, June 28 1953.

"American" bargaining by mutual agreement that had been used at Dodge:

> Collective bargaining, as it is known in America, has completely broken down in Dodge Main Plant. It has been replaced by a dictatorial management who insist that they and they alone shall dictate terms of employment, in hours of work, wages and working conditions...
>
> Continual hounding of workers for more work seems to be the general policy throughout the plant...
>
> Certain rights, such as wash up time, enjoyed by workers since the beginning of our Union are slowly taken away from them...
>
> We must remind Dodge Management that we did not organize to be apple polishers, nor did we organize for the greater glory of Chrysler Corporation; but we organized for the mutual protection against the dictatorial managements in Dodge Main Plant and elsewhere.83

But although they got an 80% majority for a strike,[84] the rapidly worsening economic situation that set in with the 1954 model year caused first 12,000 and then 20,000 lay-offs.[85] The strike call was deferred while the local called unemployment demonstrations demanding "A Public Works Program Now".[86] Management's tightening-up strategy survived - at least until the model year boom of 1955.

Resistance pays

In June 1954, despite the attempt by Norman Matthews, the UAW

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83. EB statement, DMN, August 22 1953.

84. DMN, September 5 1953. The vote was taken on a rag-bag of 31 issues that suggest the growing managerial confidence induced by the 1954 recession and the Mckinsey report. The first five grievances were: The Assistant Labour Relations Supervisor spying on men in latrines; transferring operations from Dodge to locations outside Michigan; management providing inaccurate information on work schedules; the use of outside contractors; and "foremen and supervisors intimidating stewards and refusing to allow them time to take care of grievances".

85. DMN, December 5, December 26 1953.

86. Detroit Free Press, April 14 1954.

Chrysler Director, to rebuild a viable anti-Cheal caucus,[87] the centre-left Blue Slate was re-elected - and, for the first time following constitutional changes brought in by the Reutherite majority at the 1951 UAW Convention, their period of office was two years.[88] What was seen by management as a set-back for Chrysler-UAW relations caused it swiftly to issue a new challenge. Two trim department workers were fired for refusing to use a new method of installing window trim when the company refused to time study it.[89] Supervision was again trying to break with the custom and practice of sectional collective bargaining on the introduction of new work methods.

This time, however, the EB responded to the challenge and called a plant-wide strike, using the dormant strike vote of September 1953 as justification. Five days later the IEB pulled the rug from beneath the feet of Local 3 and ruled that the previous strike vote did not apply.[90] Chrysler immediately pointed

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87. DMN, May 15 1954.

88. Grudzen, while still Local 3 President, had spoken in favour of two yearly elections at the UAW convention. He defended himself in the DMN, April 18 1953: "First I spoke of the enormous cost to the Local Union and second, the political bitterness which is created... I feel that we have grown up. We are now 17 years old, and should be no different in a Local level than the entire public. It is the policy in local government to have two year elections." The other main argument used by Reuther in support of this move was the cost of having annual elections, estimated at $90,081 for Dodge Main alone in 1952.

89. Detroit Free Press, July 17 1954.

90. Detroit Times, July 24, July 26 1954.

out the lessons to Joe Cheal. The Dodge Main Operating Manager, O W Franke, warned him and the international that unless they acted to "prevent a recurrence" of the unauthorized strike, Cheal would be "terminated" (full-time Local 3 officers were paid by the UAW but were on a leave of absence from Chrysler) and Chrysler would "collect information necessary to file a law suit requesting damages against you and the Dodge Local Union."[91]

The IEB expected the issue to die there. But the Blue Slate administration at Dodge Main stood in the classic tradition. Joe Cheal had been chairman of the AIWA's maintenance workers' local in 1935[92] and, like his vice president Pat Quinn, had nearly twenty years of sectional union activity behind him. They were not going to let management have the victory so easily. When production began to boom again on the 1955 models, the EB threatened a renewal of action unless management negotiated on production standards as well as on seniority. Chrysler, squeezed by its lowest share of passenger car registrations since 1931, agreed.

First, a seniority agreement laid down that for every eight

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91. Dodge Local 3 Collection, WRL, Presidents' files; Letter from O W Franke to J Cheal, July 30 1954.

92. DMN. September 14 1957.

seniority workers recalled in any one department, management would have to take two workers off the plant-wide "Master Seniority List". Particular problems that arose would be sorted out "by mutual agreement between the Union and the Management."[93] Part-forced by union pressure, part-conceded under a less antagonistic labour relations strategy that recognized it did not raise labour costs (by 1954 at least 20% of jobs in most departments could be learned within minutes), this resolution of the seniority issue at Dodge Main was essentially reactive. Management, after a brief panic over the threat to its 1955 model cars, adopted a set of seniority rules its workers felt, by a seven to three majority, were 'fair'.[94]

In October, the two sacked Department 99 workers were reinstated with back pay, and the two Dodge Main labour relations executives, Clarence W Johnson and Lewis B Larkin signed two documents accepting certain restraints on managerial rights would operate through the end of the 1955 model year. The Dodge Main News was exuberant:

> The Chief Point in the agreement is that once the rates of production are set...they cannot be changed unless a technological change takes place. Under this set-up foremen cannot, every few weeks, demand more production resulting in confusion and wildcat strikes.95

Almost as important for the assembly line worker was management's

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93. Local 3 Collection, WRL, Box 5, File 107: Dodge Division/Local 3 Seniority Agreement, 9-8-54.

94. Detroit Free Press, September 13 1954.

95. DMN, October 16 1954.

agreement that "on assembly line operations employees will not be required to make up skips".[96] So if there were breakdowns or shortages, the supervision couldn't try to make up the lost production by running the line faster than the maximum scheduled speed. The company also put in writing a promise not to obstruct workers and stewards from complaining "about a job being too fast" by insisting the protest was in writing before the company would negotiate on it: "Facts will be made available for examination when a verbal complaint is made", the "memorandum of understanding" added.[97] This, of course, was a key concession, since it confirmed de facto recognition of the blue button stewards, who were the ones most likely to bargain verbally with the supervision.

A second memorandum addressed the permanent aggravation of skilled workers: the use of outside contractors while some skilled workers were laid off. This agreement acknowledged the union request "that since there are maintenance employees laid off that no work be contracted out on which they have customarily worked", and said it would "review the situation in cases of this kind and give due consideration to calling back laid-off

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96. Dodge Local 3 collection, WRL; Memorandum of Understanding (regarding the production dispute at the Dodge Main Plant), October 8 1954.

97. ibid. This agreement was called "Notation of understanding or intent as to the application of the memorandum". Johnson and Larkin were clearly not going to admit they had signed an actual agreement with Local 3. The stress by management on locally-negotiated written agreements only developed from the early 1960s once the balance of forces was clearly in management's favour.

employees".[98] This was Cheal paying his debt to the Dodge Main skilled workers whose growing discontent had been a major feature of the Korean war period, when skilled workers in the 'Big Three' found their rates falling behind those in Detroit's open shops, and so demanded more overtime. The two agreements together were Chrysler's version of 'peace in our time', holding operations that reinforced the legitimacy of struggled-for restraints.

They show the extent of Dodge Main workers' frontier of control ten years after the end of World War II. The workers were essentially defending custom and practice, but management continued to undermine the tradition on which they were based. The threat to "terminate" the Local 3 president, for example, had some effect. In May 1955, when a group of 14 trim shop workers picketed the plant in protest against a three day disciplinary lay-off of three women for failing to do their job, the Dodge EB tried to stop their strike spreading:

> Union sound trucks from Dodge Local 3, UAW-CIO, appeared at the scene early today to urge day shift workers to go to their jobs after it appeared the trouble might spread to the day shift.
>
> Despite the Local's statement that walkouts were never authorized, a group in the trim shop left their jobs at 10 am, resulting in the lay-offs of 7,500 other in the plant.[99]

Where sectional stoppages continued at a high rate in 1955 and 1956, pressure from the international to keep to the contract and the threat to activists' jobs meant strikers were increasingly

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98. Dodge Local 3 Collection, WRL; Memorandum, September 301954.

99. Detroit News, May 6 1955.

isolated. By 1955 strike action was still part of rank and file consciousness but the Local 3 leaders no longer openly defended its legitimacy in preserving custom and practice. Neither the Local 3 president nor the Dodge Main plant committee chairman would openly challenge contract-legality again. The ground had been laid for the major managerial clawback of 1956-1959.

CHAPTER 11

A COLD ONE

1956-1959

Lack of investment and poor product policy were primarily responsible for Chrysler's deteriorating market position in the mid-1950s. But the workplace control issue was the one that could unite management in a way the highly contentious questions of product design and investment did not.[1] By 1955, when Ford and GM produced 115% and 70% more cars per manual worker than they had averaged between 1946 and 1949, Chrysler produced 15% less.[2] Chrysler management was acutely conscious of the 'standards gap' and closing it became the operational cutting edge of its 1956-1959 strategy. Management's restructuring and the sense of urgency created by the staccato effect of the four 1950s production slumps, led to an unprecedented consistency in labour relations policy. In certain ways, Chrysler approached, for the first time, the 'management by policy' that had characterized GM's labour relations since 1939.[3] This development was assisted

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1. Hill points out "that all levels of management have an interest in the preservation of managerial prerogatives, because these effect the scope of their own jobs"; op cit, 84.

2. See Table 10 above.

3. Harris, op cit, 29.

by the agreement of the 'Big Three' auto manufacturers to conduct what amounted to joint bargaining with the UAW in 1958,[4] and by the onset of what industrial relations academics called a 'hard line' in management thinking.[5] For four years from 1956 the frontier of control moved in management's favour. There were moments when that movement was slowed, but it was never halted or reversed.

Section one traces the sharpening conflict between 1955 and 1957: management made its preparations in 1955; Colbert formally declared war in 1956 and a furious battle began in 1957. Section two considers the traumatic year 1958 when the Dodge Local 3 was taken on and defeated in a stand-up fight.

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4. Frank C Pierson, 'Recent Employer Alliances in Perspective', Industrial Relations, I, no.1 (October 1961), 39.

5. For one example see: Jack Barbash, "Union Response to the 'Hard Line'", Industrial Relations, I, no.1 (October 1961), 25. He noted four elements in management's 'hard line': a determination to extract the maximum benefits of automation; demands for radical changes to work rules; forcing strikes; and a major public relations campaign against wage rises and 'feather-bedding'.

I. Preparing for conflict

After the acquisition of Briggs Body in 1953, and the initiation of expansion away from its Detroit concentration, Dodge Main's share of the total Chrysler workforce decreased from about a third to a quarter and then a fifth. But it still remained a crucial symbol, both for management and for local union activists, of what was respectively worst and best in labour relations. It naturally became the principal battleground in management's late-1950s bid to reassert its autonomy. The time study department was modernised; new work standards were drawn up and imposed; and rank and file opposition was contained by the international.

Time study

Early in 1955, the Dodge Main time study department was built up and a major influx of "crewcuts" undertook a complete time study of the lines in all departments. At first many workers treated them as a joke.[6] But this systematic time study operation was very different from the previous single job studies. As a plant-wide exercise, it threw into question departmental custom and practice. One department to experience this early on was Department 73. During the war the heavy press shop workers won a relief agreement, "where the workers worked 50 minutes every hour

6. DMN, February 5 1955, reported with surprise that 17 time study men were now operating in Dodge Main. They were known at the time as "crewcuts". Liska interview.

and then shut down to rest for 10 minutes."[7] In 1955, the pressure to standardize conditions throughout the plant meant supervision began to insist the press lines stopped for only three minutes in every hour and that production increased accordingly. Custom and practice that allowed heavy press workers 80 minutes personal relief a day was not compatible with 'scientific' time study that only allowed for 24.[8]

The 1955 time study exercise also provided management for the first time with a total view of the labour input and costs of the press, body, trim and assembly lines. If production could be speeded up and/or manning levels reduced in these areas, then, management reasoned, pressure would be automatically increased on the sub-assembly, machining, off-track assembly and repair sections that fed the main lines. But 1955 saw Chrysler hit a new production peak of 1,361,835 cars, and this postponed any managerial interest in precipitate action. The 1955 contract was signed after a mere six hours' strike by salaried UAW members to secure their inclusion in the new Supplementary Unemployment Benefit (SUB) pattern established by the Ford contract. Chrysler also dropped its demand to limit chief stewards to three hours a

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7. DMN, May 7 1955. Ironically, this was similar to the shop agreement that operated in Chyrsler UK's Linwood press shop in the early 1970s.

8. In the walkouts that resulted from management's unilateral imposition of the new relief arrangement, and in a trim shop walkout the following week that resulted in workers being fired, Joe Cheal argued against strike action. Under pressure from the international, gearing up for the national contract negotiations, he believed management was "trying to provoke a strike at Dodge". DMN, May 7, May 14 1955.

day bargaining.[9]

The drive to improve productivity only took off when demand for cars began to fall in January and February 1956, and after Keller's departure left Colbert in complete control. By early February, the Local 3 EB called a strike vote against the speed-up:

> Our patience is at an end. We will not go back to the good old days, for the bosses, before we organized a union. We will not knuckle down to crackpot demands for more and more production. We will fight back with the one weapon we have at our command. We will strike if necessary to preserve decent working conditions in the Dodge plant.[10]

The workers voted massively for strike action:[11]

For	9,376
Against	408
Invalid	4
	9,788

But falling demand and lay-offs were not conducive to action, despite the 95.7% vote in favour. Management maintained its pressure and introduced the practice of issuing "tickets", written warnings, to workers for not working faster.[12] In June 1956, amid

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9. DMN, August 20 1955, viewed the restriction upon chief stewards as particularly threatening because Chrysler was insisting they should not bargain during the first hour in the morning or the first hour after lunch: "These are the hours when the foremen jockey manpower around to suit their purpose. During these two hours the boss would be supreme and no matter what the boss was doing the steward would have no right to protest." This restriction had been in force on committeemen in GM plants for some years; Anderson and Jefferys, op cit, Chapter 9.

10. DMN, February 18 1956.

11. Dodge Local 3 Collection, WRL, Box 1. Letter, Cheal to Assistant Director, UAW Regional Director, March 10 1956.

12. DMN, April 4 1956, reports "tickets" being issued to six door-jamb paint sprayers in the fifth floor Department 91 paint shop.

these deteriorating conditions, Pat Quinn became the Blue Slate candidate for president to succeed Joe Cheal, who was not identified with production workers' problems. Running against the Reutherite, Art Grudzen, Quinn's anti-speed-up slate had no problems, and Quinn was elected to the position he had first held in 1939.[13] It was as if he had been selected to personify the old tradition in the coming battle with the new.

New work standards

Hostilities were formally announced by Colbert in a letter to all employees in September 1956:

> We have developed new work standards. These standards are comparable to those of the same jobs at Ford and GM, and they are fair in themselves. Meeting these new work standards means only that each one of us will do, on his own job, as much work as the employees doing the same work at Ford or GM. It takes that much effort to give us the job security and progress we are all shooting for.
>
> By measuring up to our new work standards each one of us will be able to do his and her part to make sure that no one at Ford or GM is taking over work that could be done in Chrysler plants."[14]

The letter was a declaration of war on a tradition of mutuality in establishing standards to which both workers and their supervisors had been a party for nearly twenty years. What made it significantly different from lower key declarations of intent made previously was that this statement of position accompanied a major managerial reorganization and took place at the beginning of the 1957 model year.

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13. DMN, June 16 1956.

14. Colbert letter, "To the Men and Women of Chrysler Corporation", September 5 1956, in Dodge Local 3 Collection, WRL.

Skirmishes over work standards took place from September 1956 through until March 1957, much longer than was customary on new models. These months were characterized by supervision's readiness to ignore the contract when it gave the workers a degree of restraint over their actions. The provisions in the 1955 contract stipulating advance notice of time study and suggesting the elimination of supervisory "estimated standards" were disregarded when inconvenient.[15] The UAW response to the added intensity of management pressure was to carry on as usual: a Chrysler Conference condemned Colbert's letter, there was an 84% majority for strike action in a Local 3 ballot, and the Dodge Main News complained:

> Certain rights, such as relief time, negotiated work standards and wash-up time enjoyed by our members since the beginning of our Union are slowly being taken away from them...Since the start of the 1957 model Dodge workers have been subjected to a barrage of threats, intimidation and abuse. Time study men have been hired by the dozens and placed in the various departments to breath down the workers' necks.16

Reuther himself acknowledged there were more strikes pending on production standards in Chrysler plants than in the rest of the UAW combined.[17]

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15. DMN, October 27 1956: when a section walked out in protest at the sudden imposition of a time study on a job in the piston department, the management issued all the strikers with written warnings. DMN, November 25 1956: the trim shop walked out in protest against "piles of tickets" issued by foremen to workers who refused to accept the times the foremen had "estimated".

16. DMN, September 29 1956, January 26 1957.

17. DMN, March 16 1957.

But Reuther, having successfully dealt with the main pocket of mid-1950s opposition at the River Rouge, had no interest in supporting strikes in defence of pre-Time Study production standards in Chrysler plants. He told the Chrysler Conference in October 1956 that "the leadership in the Chrysler plants must face this question (of production standards) practically and realistically...in line with a fair day's work."[18] Nor was there any likelihood of the kind of solidarity action between Chrysler plants that had occurred in 1943, 1945 and 1947.[19] While it protested against the speed-up, Pat Quinn's Local 3 EB was isolated both as one of the few remaining anti-Reuther administrations and from its own membership. The blue button steward system had fallen away in most areas and, following the introduction of two-yearly terms of office in 1954, the position of chief steward had become still more remote. Like Joe Cheal before him, Quinn therefore pressed for compromise on Chrysler's demands rather than for the lengthy plant-wide strike that could, in the last year Chrysler's share of the market achieved 20%, have had some chance of success.

'Rank and File' opposition

There was a general understanding among Dodge workers in 1957

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18. UAW Spotlight, Special Chrysler Bulletin, March 1957.

19. In the early and mid-1940s, informal factional links through the Chrysler locals had been able to organize joint action or exert collective pressure on the International. After Reuther's consolidation in power in 1947-49, these no longer existed. Each plant was totally on its own.

that this was not an old-time quarrel over a few production standards: it was an argument about the frontier of control. Management had made this clear in Colbert's letter, and repeated it during the negotiations on the 1957 agreement. Chrysler Vice President Frank W Misch, in a speech to potential shareholders, told the New York Society of Security Analysts that Chrysler had completed a major cost-cutting exercise and, more explosively, that the UAW's leadership had co-operated:

> In September 1956 we took another major step in the direction of making our company more competitive on costs and improving its overall operating efficiency. For two years our industrial engineers had been measuring our manufacturing operations with a view to raising our plant productivity, which was not in line with that of our major competitors. With the start of production of our completely new 1957 cars, most of the assembly line operations would be basically changed. This change-over period was the only appropriate time to realign the assembly-line tasks. For many months preceding the start of Production of the 1957 cars, the analysis of work methods and standards was carried down to individual operations. The leadership of the UAW-CIO had been informed of our plans, with a full background of what was at stake.20

The international was stung by this revelation into producing a special four page bulletin denying the charge of "co-operation".[21] Its denial was not of the substance of Misch's argument - that the UAW had known what was going on - but was instead directed at Misch's argument that "the tightening-up of production standards was a main factor" in Chrysler's "recovery". The UAW preferred to argue "to the extent that it has made any recovery...it was brought about by too long delayed technological improvements and a start towards production rationalization." The

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20. UAW-Spotlight, Special Chrysler Bulletin, March 1957.

21. ibid

element of truth in this applied more to the machining areas, where automatic transfer equipment had been introduced, than to the production lines that were under the greatest pressure.

The high level of discontent with management and the international led in 1957 to 512 reported unauthorized stoppages in Chrysler plants. At Dodge Main, four or five workers from areas experiencing the worst speed-up, the body shop and trim departments, had begun meeting together after being elected to Local 3's Publicity Committee in 1956. They included Edie Fox, a Socialist Workers' Party member who had worked at Dodge since 1948.[22] They formed a 'Rank and File' caucus to fight on the production standards issue and, to their surprise, they tapped a great well of anger and frustration. Quinn finally got Chrysler to agree to a compromise on February 27 1957. The agreement gave management considerable increases in production while promising not to change standards again in the 1957 model year. This did not amount to much since the 1957 models had only another five months to run. Dodge vice president and former trim department chief steward, Pete Teliskey, described the benefits for department 99. Out of the 900 operations in the department, he suggested production standards had only been increased on 28,

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22. Interviews with Edie Fox, Ed Liska. Dodge Main was also exceptional in the UAW because it didn't appoint the members of the local's standing committees (veterans, education, publicity etc), but continued to elect them.

while they had been decreased on 14. And he argued that since it was a written agreement:

> You know when you go to work how many pieces you are to do each hour for the balance of the '57 model...Work standards are to remain 'as is' for the balance of the 1957 model year...No more tickets, no more threats, no more disciplines on rates of production.23

Those who had to work the new standards, however, didn't see things the same way.

At the first mass meeting on the new agreement, the former plant committee chairman, now international rep, Jimmy Solomon and the local officials were virtually shouted down and the meeting was taken over by opponents of the agreement. Thousands of the workers wore the 'Rank and File' buttons.[24] Table 12, listing the hourly production rates on ten trim department jobs before and after the 1957 agreement, illustrates why such anger remained:

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23. DMN March 23 1957.

24. Fox interview.

TABLE 12
DODGE MAIN TRIM DEPARTMENT SELECTED PRODUCTION STANDARDS, BEFORE AND AFTER THE 1957 AGREEMENT

Operation	Amount performed before 1957 agreement	Company demand Winter 1956/57	Amount laid down by 1957 agreement	Actual increase worked (%)
Windlace	7	9	8	14.3
Door moulding	15	22	18	20
Cloth headlining	2.5 (team)	No demand	2.5 (team)	0
Installation of instrument panel to body	6 (team)	9 (team)	7.5 (team)	25
Chrome windshield moulding on hardtops	12	23	15	25
Lower belt chrome	6.5	9	6.5	0
Glass vent	6	10	7	16.7
Door pads on South line	30	36	30	0
Door pads on North line	26	36	28	7.7
Lower chrome windshield moulding	16	23	19	18.8

SOURCE: UAW Research Department Collection, WRL, Box 79: data related to Chrysler speed-up dispute, 1958.

In sections where standards were not raised, the company's demands had made workers realize they could be next. It took Quinn and Solomon, who negotiated the 1957 production standards agreement, ten days and several mass meetings to persuade the membership to accept it.[25] A few weeks later the Rank and File caucus put up a full slate in the election of delegates to the 1957 UAW Atlantic City convention - and, to their amazement and the fury of the international and the Local 3 officer corps who were denied their customary vacation,[26] the White Slate outsiders picked up 22 of

25. DMN, February 16, March 9 1957.

26. Attendance at the week long UAW convention was increasingly seen as a vacation by most delegates after 1949 and the consolidation of Reuther's faction in power and the introduction of biennial conventions; Liska interview; Anderson and Jefferys, op cit, .

the 35 places.

The Dodge Main 1957 Rank and File delegation to Atlantic City created one of the last big stirs at any UAW Convention.[27] Heads began to be turned when they opposed the dues increase. The outspoken Scot from the paint shop, Alfred McNeil, lashed into the UAW officials:

> I am opposed to a dues increase because of all the trouble that we have had in the Dodge company. We have had representation that does not amount to 50 cents. I don't think any of our International reps will go hungry.[28]

When it came to a resolution commending the IEB for "unwavering adherence to the policy of authorizing strikes where collective bargaining has proved futile", Reuther deliberately called Edith Fox to the microphone. She attacked the resolution, arguing that "we, the rank-and-file members of our Union, have demonstrated a willingness to fight back but we are being discouraged in our efforts by our International leadership." Her five minutes was immediately followed by a lengthy piece of red-baiting by Norman Matthews, the director of the UAW Chrysler Department. "Where was this Fox girl?" in the hundred days' strike of 1950, he asked. He accused the "so-called rank and file group" of only getting elected because they passed out leaflets while the blue and green slates had agreed not to conduct an election campaign this year.

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27. The view of Ed Liska, who has either attended or received detailed reports on all the subsequent Conventions. He did not attend the 1973 Convention with its rows over dues and the three-yearly scheduling of all elections.

28. UAW, 16th Convention Proceedings, April 7-12 1957, Atlantic City, New Jersey, 198.

And he argued, "I think it is about time this Convention should give us the authority to deal with these people in quick order..."[29]

The UAW's own figures did not support the argument that the international had backed its locals. In February 1957, 12 Chrysler plants requested strike authorization, but only one authorized strike resulted, and only two other authorized strikes took place in the whole of 1957.[30] To cover up this poor record, Matthews conceded the opposition's demand that overtime in all Chrysler plants be stopped while the month-long strike by 4,000 workers in the Chrysler Los Angeles plant, Local 230, was taking place. "Now," he asked rhetorically, "who is militant? Are these fakers that sit in this audience militant, or is the leadership of the Chrysler plants militant, plus the International Union, my friends?" Reuther himself then wound up the debate, accusing the Dodge Main delegation of wasting time and justifying the intolerance of dissent shown by Matthews and himself:

> If the people who provoke these kinds of discussion will just think before they do, we would save a lot of time of this Convention. But they are not going to get away with untruths, because we are going to answer them.31

Reuther's convention bullying had nothing in common with the

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29. ibid, 311-328.

30. Figures in Spotlight, March 1957, and Corporation data.

31. ibid, 311-328.

'democratic' left reputation he cultivated outside the UAW.[32]

II. Decisive struggle

The 1958 recession was traumatic. Chrysler only produced 581,244 cars, its lowest output between 1947 and 1980, a level 29% below its average yearly production from 1946-49. In line with this dramatic market collapse, mass lay-offs and severances cut its hourly-paid labour force to 59,440 - a post-war employment figure lower than at any time except for the 1961-2 and 1980 recessions.[33] The slump was made worse by the legacy of Chrysler's managerial crisis. Colbert had rushed the new 1957 models into production before they had been properly tested, and they had "numerous structural flaws and rampant rust problems".[34] As the complaints multiplied, Chrysler lost its reputation for engineering quality at the precise moment the bottom fell out of

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32. Not surprisingly, the IEB ended up with its commendation from the UAW Convention. Yet the public argument that something could and should have been done to prevent the loss of mutuality over production standards during the 1957 boom was remembered in the 1960 elections in Dodge Main. Then, after a lay-off affecting the majority of production workers for between 12 and 18 months, when workers finally returned to discover working conditions quite unlike those they had experienced before, several of the prime movers of the 'Rank and File' caucus such as Edie Fox and Ed Liska were elected chief stewards for the first time; Fox and Liska interviews. Liska resigned as steward shortly after being elected since the existing organization in the body shop had made it clear they were out to make life as difficult for him as possible if he came from nowhere to take the steward's privileges.

33. Company data. GM and Ford were also hit in this recession, but not nearly so dramatically. Thus GM's 1958 production level of 2.12m cars was only its lowest since 1952 and was still 30% above the average for the late 1940s; and Ford's production of 1.22m cars in 1958 was 38% up on its average production from 1946 to 1949.

34. Stuart, op cit, 65.

the market.

The severity of the recession presented Chrysler, and many other managements, with both ideal conditions to exercise near total intransigence in labour relations and the incentive to act decisively.[35] Chrysler's all-time record number of strikes in 1957 was repeated in 1958, despite a 40% smaller labour force. The strike frequency rate therefore shot up. More than eight strikes took place for every 1,000 Chrysler workers in 1958, compared to over five in 1957 and an average of 1.5 during the previous ten years. The argument that this greater strike frequency was the outcome of a conscious determination by management to reassert its authority is supported not merely by this counter-cyclical rise in the number of decisions to stop work,[36] but also by the still greater increase in the average number of hours lost while on unauthorized strike. Chrysler workers lost an average of 17.4 hours a year on unauthorized strike between 1947 and 1956; in 1957 this figure rose to 25.1 hours and in 1958 to 91 hours. If the 4.55m man-hours lost in the two authorized strikes that year (including the Dodge Main one) are added to the 5.41m man-hours lost in unauthorized strikes, then each Chrysler worker lost on

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35. Northrup, op cit, 9, argued that "management's tougher stand vis-a-vis unions is not a matter of tactics or, in most cases, even philosophy, but is rather the result of some ugly economic facts of life which management has all too belatedly recognized."

36. See above: Table 3 and Figure 1. For this interpretation of a rising strike frequency, see the argument by P K Edwards, "Britain's changing strike problem", Industrial Relations Journal, XIII, no. 2 (1982).

average a month's work: 21 full eight hour shifts.[37]

This high strike loss resulted from a threefold managment strategy. Once it realized there was little to be done to improve Chrysler's sales position in the 1958 model year, management accompanied mass lay-offs with a renewed offensive on the production standards of those still at work. Fortuitously for the 'Big Three', the 1955 auto industry contracts expired that summer, so Chrysler seized upon the UAW tactic of 'working without a contract' to tear up the remaining custom and practice agreements that still restrained its 'right to manage'. And finally, aware that for a decisive defeat to be registered, a battle must be fought, Chrysler engaged the Dodge Main workers in a stand-up authorized strike, and beat them.

Man Assignments

Local 3 president Pat Quinn and plant committee chairman Steve Pasica became aware of the new management strategy on January 7 1958. They were summoned to a meeting by the Dodge Labour Relations Director and given two days' notice of a lay-off of a further 3,500 workers. This was not unexpected, since the same number had already been laid off since the start of the 1958 model year and it would bring the number of Dodge workers down to around 10,000. What was unexpected was the news that the plant would be shut down for two weeks and that those called back on

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37. Company data.

January 22 would have to work to a new method of determining production rates called "Man Assignment Programs".[38]

Militants like Ed Liska in the body-in-white had continued to complain about the pressure at the start of the 1958 models:

> The working conditions at the Dodge Plant have been at its lowest ebb since our Union was organized. Work schedules have been changed, not only in 1957 but 1956 as well. Nearly every worker has been putting out approximately 40% more production than in the past years.[39]

But by comparison with what was to follow, the inititial pressure was quite slight. Management used the January 1958 two-week shut-down to unveil plant-wide man assignment schedules that increased production in the trim shop from 92 to 97 cars an hour with 26% fewer workers.[40] But those working were the lucky ones: the 9,000 workers laid off didn't start getting recalled until September 1959, 20 months' later.[41]

The man assignments finally finished off the old custom and practice of establishing a "fair" standard between the worker, the blue button steward and the foreman. It allocated work on a different basis to the old system. Before, the jobs came first and the labour force was divided up to cover them. The system created considerable anomalies since certain jobs took a great

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38. DMN, January 18 1958.

39. DMN, January 11 1958.

40. DMN, March 8 1958; in December 1957 1,649 trim department workers produced 736 cars per shift; from January 20 1958, the remaining 1,225 workers produced 776 cars a day.

41. DMN, February 25 1961.

deal of time, while others could be finished much more quickly. Under the new system, the total available labour time came first, and the work was then divided up so each worker's time was as close as possible to fully occupied. The man assignments were prepared in the Industrial Engineers' (IE) department, away from the shop floor. And they were universal across the plant, tying all direct production workers to a common effort and output. The increases in individual productivity demanded from the assembly side of the plant were considerable. A UAW document used in the negotiations that took place at the end of February 1958 gave figures of a speed-up of between 17 and 43%:

TABLE 13
1958: INCREASED PRODUCTION DEMANDS MADE BY CHRYSLER AT DODGE MAIN

Department	1957 Production	1957 Manpower	1958 Requested Prod.	1958 Manpower	Increase %
Body in white	1504	2384	776	933	31.9
Trim (day shift)	744	1650	776	1201	30
Final Assembly:					
Department 122	720	380	776	342	19.6
Department 123	720	490	776	450	17.3
Motor Assembly	880	355	720	200	43.3

SOURCE: UAW Research Department Collection, WRL, Box 79; document dated February 24 1958.

Workers throughout Dodge Main tried to defend the old system by refusing to work to the new standards and in the second week of

the new system hundreds were sent home for failing to keep up to the new man assignments.[42] In the trim shop at the center of the struggle, five workers were fired during the first two weeks of February. Four others were dismissed in other areas of the plant.[43] When so many workers had been sent home that it was impossible to continue to run the plant, management simply sent the other workers home. In the 22 days following the introduction of the new man assignments, the trim shop only worked an average of three hours and 35 minutes a day. But during those hours, the actual production rate, 68 an hour on the 1957 standards, rose from 75 an hour on January 22 to hit 80 an hour regularly in February 1958.[44]

Aware that management was trying to provoke strikes Quinn tried to keep everybody working - and so he made it known that anyone who was fired on a production standard issue would be put on the Local 3 payroll. Chrysler responded in kind, by announcing that it would oppose the payment of state unemployment benefit to those laid off, on the grounds that the local's support of those disciplined for refusing to work to standard was tantamount to an admission of an industrial dispute.

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42. DMN, February 8 1958.

43. DMN, February 22 1958. McNeil described management's tactics as "terrorist", ibid, March 1 1958.

44. UAW Research Department collection, Box 79; data related to Chrysler speed-up dispute 1958. The actual figures were, of course, significantly below the capacity figures laid down by management on the assumption of no break-downs, shortages, or other forms of interruption, given in the "production demands" made by Chrysler above.

On this occasion, Reuther and Colbert personally took over the negotiations. Their agreement, on March 3, was an even sharper declaration of management's rights than had been contained in the 1957 production standards' agreement. This time Chrysler's concessions were merely notional. It agreed to withdraw its threat to the unemployment benefit of those laid off, to reinstate the nine sacked workers and to restore the earlier production standards - except where improvements in method had been introduced. Where "improvements" had occurred (and they were fairly widespread since the 25% cut in the labour force in January had necessitated a major redistribution of work) IEs would look at the assignments again if there were any problems. In return, the UAW formally agreed to allow management to continue to revise production standards during the model year.[45] Management had won a significant victory. Table 14 illustrates the effect of the 1958 agreement on the same ten trim department jobs considered in Table 12 above:

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45. DMN, March 15 1958.

TABLE 14
DODGE MAIN TRIM DEPARTMENT SELECTED PRODUCTION STANDARDS, BEFORE AND AFTER THE 1957 MAN ASSIGNMENTS

Operation	Amount performed after 1957 agreement	Company demand January 1958	Amount worked March 1958	Actual increase worked (%)
Windlace	8	13.96	9	12.5
Door moulding	18	31.4	19	5.5
Cloth headlining	2.5 (team)	5.8 (team)	3 (team)	20
Installation of instrument panel to body	7.5 (team)	15 (team)	10 (team)	33.3
a.Chrome windshield moulding on hardtops	15	38	15	0
b.Lower belt chrome	6.5	12.5	6.5	
Glass vent	7	17.6	12	71.4
Door pads on South line	30	48	30	0
c.Door pads on North line	28	48	30	7.1
Lower chrome windshield moulding	19	40	34	78.9

SOURCE: UAW Research Department Collection, WRL, Box 79: data related to Chrysler speed-up dispute, 1958.

NOTES: a. This job's production standard had been increased 25% in 1957.
b. One of the few jobs to show no increase in either 1957 or 1958.
c. Over 1957 and 1958 the standards for door pads on the North line were raised to equal those on the South line which didn't change.

The speed-up begun in 1957 was continued in, from management's point of view, the much more favourable circumstances of 1958 and produced an average rise in productivity on these ten jobs of 28% over the two model years.[46] While it is not possible to reconstruct any completely reliable comparisons between the pace of work in GM and Ford plants as against Chrysler, the marked difference that was frequently commented upon in the 1950s had

46. This is on the assumption that these jobs, which were selected by the UAW Research Department at the time for negotiating purposes, had fairly stable manning levels.

undoubtedly been substantially eroded by 1959 and 1960.[47]

No contract

In June 1958 the Chrysler workers, like those at GM and Ford, stayed at work after the expiry of the 1955 contracts. Leonard Woodcock, head of the UAW GM Department, said, "We are going to rock and roll all summer."[48] Reuther told the Wall St Journal:

> I think it's good for the union's soul to work for a while without a contract. It'll make the members aware of a lot of things that used to be automatic.[49]

Car sales were so low, the argument went, there was no possibility of extracting any concessions from the employers until the start of the 1959 models. But like much of the "strategy" bargaining which emerged from Reuther in the post-war years, it was an analysis which looked at the industry from the vantage point of access to the boardrooms rather than from the stance of shop floor workers having to live with the consequences. Colbert sent a letter to all Chrysler workers letting them know there would be "some change in arrangements for handling grievances" and reminding them that "shop rules forbid collection initiation fees,

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47. Arguments such as the following one by Edith Fox, reporting from the Dodge Main Trim Shop, DMN, March 15 1958, no longer appeared in the 1960s or 1970s: "Now let us say that if the company could get away with establishing standards in the Chrysler plants like those of its competitors, what then? Would they then not point to the men and women in the unorganized shops and say to us, that these are your fellow men, all of you members of the human race, that they are working harder than you, and we therefore demand standards comparable to those of these unorganized workers? When they have completed speeding up the American workers they can begin looking around in other areas and point to the many exploited peoples elsewhere on this earth. With the conquest of space, there is no limit to what Mr Lacy (Chrysler VP) may discover on other planets in the coming years as a basis to speed up the Chrysler workers."

48. Quoted in William Serrin, The Company and the Union (New York: Vintage, 1974), 175.

49. Quoted approvingly in DMN, June 28 1958.

dues and assessments during working hours."[50] Reuther's idea may well have been that what the workers lost in the 'no contract' period they could regain subsequently. But in Chrysler plants what was lost was lost permanently and, since this included the tradition of sectional bargaining, it was never recovered.[51]

Two days after the contract expired, Chrysler tore up the departmental relief agreement that still operated in Dodge Main's body-in-white, and laid off the 35 workers who acted as the additional tag relief men. The relief agreement in Department 76 had been introduced in 1938 on the grounds that the heat and dust in the body-in-white was much worse than in other departments. It provided each worker with a total of 70 minutes' relief a day: the 7th and 8th floor production lines stopped for five minutes' relief every hour and workers were also relieved by tagmen for two 15 minute breaks, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Rather than strike immediately in defence of this agreement, which would have jeopardized Supplementary Unemployment Benefit payments to those laid off, the body shop agreed to work the new system of 12 minutes' relief in the morning and 16 in the afternoon. The Dodge Main News approved:

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50. Quoted in DMN, June 7 1958. The result of this harassment and the collapse of its working membership was so considerable that after four months without the check-off Local 3 was forced to make small cuts in its wages and expenses.

51. Reuther subsequently acknowledged, President's Report to UAW's 17th Constitutional Convention, Atlantic City, October 9-16 1959, 22: "It was at Chrysler that working conditions became most difficult."

> The workers, sensing this trap refused to take the bait and decided at a meeting to meet the problem head on - knowing that while the company is having their turn at bat now, the workers' turn would come sooner or later and that they would get their just relief time back.52

But the "workers' time" didn't come in September when they were called back for the start up of the 1959 models. Steve Pasica then warned that "the Company said they would discharge employees if they did not stay on the job 60 minutes out of every hour",[53] and by the end of the month 24 men had been disciplined for taking the extended breaks and six had been discharged.[54] Liska reported that these men "were picked by management to show fear to other workers in the department. All production workers did exactly the same things that the [first] 26 men did but they were not penalized."[55] By October the 'just' relief system had gone.

In June, on Day Three of 'working without a contract', management instructed all chief stewards to work on their assigned jobs for six hours a day including the first hour of the shift, the first hour after lunch and the last hour of the shift.[56] At first, this provoked a show of resistance from the Dodge stewards

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52. DMN, June 14 1958.

53. Local 3 Collection, WRL, Executive Board Meetings, Box 2; EB meeting September 25 1958.

54. DMN, October 4 1958.

55. ibid.

56. DMN June 14 1958. The restriction on chief stewards and plant committeemen had been seen in 1955 as a very serious threat to the shop floor organizing role of the stewards since it was at these moments in the day that most managerial decisions about movements of labour were taken. See above: note 173, page 237.

and EB. Within a week a majority of stewards and committeemen had received first a one-day penalty lay-off and then three-day penalties for refusing to abide by the restrictions. The situation was moving fast towards mass dismissals of the Dodge stewards. The international reps, Solomon and Addis, advised the EB to accept Chrysler's terms. But the EB wanted to show more fight and so launched a new 'strategy'. The stewards and plant committeemen were to work for all eight hours a day and so effectively withdraw from all grievance machinery with the management. The unreal approach of 'fighting' management restrictions by self-restriction didn't go down well. Two days later, swamped with complaints from stewards not ready to work full-time or who saw the move as dangerous for the future of shop floor union organization, the EB rescinded its decision and accepted Chrysler's terms.[57] These amounted to a re-drawing of the bargaining map. Blue button stewards were no longer to be recognized, and foremen and superintendents were told to ignore "the chief stewards when they try to settle a grievance without reducing it to writing".[58] Informal bargaining was banished - and with it the scope for lower-level managerial discretion on which the tradition of sectional negotiations had developed. In future, all sectional and departmental grievances would have to be registered in the

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57. Local 3 Collection, WRL, Executive Board Meetings, Box 2; EB Minutes, June 10, 12 1958.

58. DMN, November 29 1958.

labour relations department so that settlements would no longer be determined by the individual supervisor but by corporate policy. The labour relations department had finally become an authority within the corporation.[59]

In August, Pat Quinn summed up the results of the 'working without a contract' strategy:

> Since June 1, the date our contract with Chrysler expired, the number of management-provoked walkouts has steadily increased as Chrysler management continues to put on the pressure and to take away many recognized practices - such as relief time, wash up time, seniority rights etc. Up to this point there has been no walkouts in our plant, but many of our negotiated practices have either been drastically changed or eliminated altogether.60

Quinn, however, was still in favour of seeing things through. Although Chrysler's Twinsburg, Ohio plant had finally struck rather than work under the new conditions on the start-up of the 1959 models,[61] Quinn was opposed to such a move at Dodge Main. There was an undercurrent of feeling that even a long strike would be preferable to the permanent erosion of working conditions. Liska reported from the hard-hit Department 76:

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59. Northrup, op cit, 13, suggests that the growth of the industrial relations function in the 1950s was partially responsible for the more conscious attempt to re-shape labour relations out of the opportunity provided by the 1958 recession; much of industry, he wrote, "had, by the mid-1950s, built up a capable core of industrial relations executives and technicians; these experts were more than anxious to perform on the basis of their training and ability rather than to accept passively top management's views on sales and profits."

60. DMN, August 23 1958.

61. Local 3 Collection, WRL, Executive Board Meetings, Box 2; EB August 14 1958.

> We do not know how other departments' workers feel about the working conditions, but the consensus of workers in our department reveals that they are willing to go on a long strike to bring back the humane working conditions in our department, and I might add, that if a contract is signed and the working conditions are not improved, the members of our department will be very much disappointed at our union leaders.62

But despite his recent re-election (in June) as Blue Slate candidate for Local 3 president, Quinn was increasingly dependent on Reuther for advice. In September he argued against precipitate strike action "because of the present (national) contract negotiations and a request by the International Union that the workers be kept on the job".[63] It was not that Quinn believed they should accept the new conditions. He told the workforce: "No honest union member could stand by and watch the gains they have made over the past 20 years go down the drain in a few short months."[64] But his strategy was to rely upon Reuther to restore these "gains" in the national contract negotiations.

The argument that the "workers' time" would come "sooner or later" ignored the reality that the legitimacy of the old workplace rules depended on their acceptance or toleration by management and their continuous exercise by the workers. There was nothing intrinsic to the old relief agreement that would allow it to be restored several months after management tore it

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62. DMN July 12 1958.

63. DMN, October 4 1958.

64. ibid.

up and workers had ceased to experience it. Collectively-imposed workplace rules restraining managerial autonomy were not bargaining items that could be added or subtracted from a contract negotiation like a demand for higher wages. 'Working without a contract' was thus a particularly dangerous strategy to adopt in Chrysler plants since the implication of 'working under management's rules' meant so much more there than in GM and Ford, where management's rules already held sway.[65] Chrysler seized the opening offered by the UAW and the market situation to transform working conditions in its plants. By October 1958 all that remained was to ensure that the national contract supported the new managerial control system at plant level, and openly and publicly to defeat its key local, Local 3, and so prevent any chance of the 1959-60 market recovery being used to turn the labour relations clock back.

Managerial authority

The UAW's 1958 'target' company, Ford, gave nothing away in its contract with the UAW, signed on September 17, so there was no prospect of Chrysler conceding anything additional. But the eighth Chrysler contract was not 'neutral'. Its 'benefits' were only for those leaving the company pay-roll (severance payments from five days' wages for up to two years' service to 150 days

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65. Relief time of just 24 minutes per eight hour shift had been imposed by Ford management in 1949; Brody, op cit, 201.

wages for those with 30 years). Those still working, however, faced two significant contractual changes that reinforced managerial authority in the workplace.

First, management redrafted the 1958 contract to reflect its new policy on production standards. The 1955 agreement had allowed informal bargaining between the chief steward and the foreman, and Chrysler had agreed to give the steward "all the data upon which the Corporation has based the standard" if the steward verbally[66] requested it. From 1958, however, "all its data supporting the standard" would be made available only "if a written grievance is filed".[67] This deterred the worker and the steward from proceeding with border-line complaints and ensured that no compromises would be reached on the job between the steward and the foreman without the involvement of the labour relations and IE departments.

The second significant change was to extend the the degree of involvement by the international in plant-level negotiations. Previously, if UAW rules had been adhered to and the IEB had sanctioned a strike, a local could stop work after five days of plant-level negotiations. From 1958 the negotiations had to continue "for at least 12 days", and the international had to

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66. UAW-Chrysler, Production and Maintenance Contract, September 1 1955, 48.

67. UAW-Chrysler, Production and Maintenance Contract, October 1 1958.

notify Chrysler "in writing" of the strike authorization and grievances involved.[68]

The 6,000 Dodge workers called back in September and October 1958 to work on the 1959 models were more concerned with the new working conditions than with the longer-term implications for the rule-making process inherent in the 1958 contract. The contract was ratified without marked opposition and the workforce proceeded to take a strike vote on "rates of production, relief time and working conditions".[69] The result was a 93% majority for a strike:[70]

Yes	3,611
No	262
Void	10
	3,883

But the small numbers voting reflected the increasingly divisive impact of the mass lay-offs[71] and the success of management's three year struggle to condition its workforce to a new definition

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68. ibid.

69. Local 3 collection, WRL, Executive Board Meetings, Box 2; Minutes October 9 1958.

70. ibid. October 15 1958.

71. In late October and November 1958 Chrysler insisted on certain sections working Saturday overtime. Despite a decision by the EB not to permit this while large numbers were laid off, EB Minutes, October 23 1958), it still persisted, leading to the local's Unemployed Committee setting up an unemployed workers' picket line in front of the plant on Saturdays in November. This created a an angry protest by the Dodge stewards asking the EB to take action to stop the picketing. The stewards argued "that something be done to organize unemployed committees in all plants of the Big Four, and then the picketing could be done a national-wide scale", EB Minutes, November 20 1958. In the event the EB, that was attended by 72 "visitors" lobbying for and against the issue of Saturday overtime, didn't vote on either position. It hoped instead that management's insistence on overtime while workers were laid off could be resolved in the continuing negotiations over what the International had by then agreed were strikeable grievances.

of 'legitimate' union activity.

Chrysler had three important advantages over its weakened opponent in the strike that finally took place between December 2 and December 19 1958. It had used the new maximum of 60 days delay between a strike vote and strike action to consolidate its new working practices at Dodge. It had also extracted an additional two months' production from the plant. Crucially, unlike the comparable moment in 1939 when the speed-up at Dodge Main had been used by the UAW as the spark to ignite a successful struggle across all Chrysler's plants,[72] the Dodge local was on its own. Although there were eight other Chrysler locals queueing up for IEB authorization to strike on speed-up, relief times and working conditions,[73] once the national contract was signed each was considered separately by the international. This was a recipe for a decisive management victory in a strike that marked the close of a twenty-year period in which the labour process at Dodge had been governed by workplace rules established through informal departmental and sectional level bargaining.

Although the Dodge Main two-week strike was the action of an individual plant, Chrysler generalized Local 3'sdefeat throughout

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72. See page 105-106 above.

73. Local 3 Collection, WRL, EB Box 2; Minutes December 13 1958.

the corporation. The "Memorandum of Understanding on Rates of Production", signed on December 19 by Jack Conway and Doug Fraser for the UAW Chrysler Department, was given the status of a corporation-wide amendment to the national contract. The 1939 contract "rates of production" clause was ambiguous:

> The Management agrees that in establishing rates of production it will make studies on the basis of fairness and equity consistent with quality of workmanship, efficiency of operations and the reasonable working capacities of normal operators.[my emphasis, SJ] 74

Instead of this commitment to studies "on the basis of fairness and equity", the December 19 1958 agreement laid down "time study" itself as the impartial marker against which the studies should be judged. And it recognized total managerial autonomy over the technique chosen to make that study. The new agreement began:

> Clause 1: Time study is a generally accepted method used by management as a basis for establishing rates of production and as a basis for determining the fairness of work loads.
> Clause 2: The method or technique used by management for the establishing of rates of production is an exclusive right to management, and the Union does not have the right to challenge the method that management selects.75

Clauses 5 and 6 of the December 1958 agreement freed management's hands in two further respects: new man assignments could be issued whenever "production schedules are increased or decreased on major conveyor operations"; and management could insist on workers continuing to work at their "normal pace" when unforeseen circumstances arose that affected the original work standard.[76] Finally, Clause 7 imposed a standard 24 minutes a day personal

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74. UAW-Chrysler Contract, November 29 1939, 14.

75. UAW-Chrysler Memorandum, December 19 1958, 1.

76. ibid, 2.

relief on all Chrysler's conveyor line workers.[77]

The agreement spurred Chrysler to complete the standardization of work standards and relief arrangements. In the stamping plant, it posted time standards on each individual machine.[78] By September 1959, when workers with ten years' seniority returned to work with "mixed emotions"[79] on the 1960 models, the new relief procedure was in force throughout the plant: the Conant stampings plant had been taken on in February and the Foundry and Core Room in August.[80] They backed down before threats to transfer their work from Dodge Main; the Wire Room did not back down and was closed.[81] The 1958 strike was as great a turning point as had been the 1939 strike. Six months later Quinn admitted that "the December agreement was a 'cold' one". Yet he justified it since "it paved the way for the production of the small Chrysler (car) at our plant."[82]

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77. ibid, 3. While this agreement applied nationally, a special relief agreement was drawn up for the Department 76 workers as the basis for the return to work. This additional agreement was to operate for the remainder of the 1959 models only, after which the 24 minutes a day agreement would apply. Until then, management agreed to stop the seventh and eighth floor conveyor lines for five minutes every other hour (four hours a day, providing an extra 20 minutes relief) on condition that the line speeds were increased to make up the production that would be lost.

78. DMN, February 19 1959. This was the first time management had been able to do this.

79. DMN, October 10 1959, report from the Final Assembly Unit.

80. DMN, February 28, August 15 1959.

81. Nalezty interview.

82. DMN, June 6 1949.

"Mutuality" had finally been driven off the shop floor. Even that face-saving form of words no longer appeared in the 1958 agreements. The scope of bargaining had been deliberately restricted to the international representatives, the full-time local officers, and to the plant committee.[83] Chief stewards were still tolerated, although their numbers were soon to be reduced, but their function was changed. From being organizers or representatives of the areas which elected them, they became merely processors of grievances. And with sectional problem-solving denied them, Chrysler workers increasingly turned to the proper 'constitutional' channels of the UAW and the company grievance procedure for answers to their problems. When these too appeared to fail, as they did to many black and younger workers in the late 1960s, then uncondoned wildcats, spontaneous, violent explosions and drug taking became the locus of continuing dissent.

The management victory meant workplace rules would in future be laid down by management and endorsed by the international and the Local 3 EB and plant committee in contract negotiations. Chrysler's shop floor rule-forming tradition had been 'normalized'

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83. The language of confrontation had given way to the muted conversation of pressure; unauthorized but condoned strikes were replaced by constitutional strike deadlines: "The Officers and President feel a 12-day notice [of strike action] is needed to move Management off dead center." These were the words of Plymouth Local 51's President Serafini reporting to his membership on the progress of negotiations over 52 strikeable grievances; Local 51 Collection, WRL, Box 17, File 5; General Membership Meeting Minutes, October 13 1963. Agreement was reached without a strike.

in line with practice at GM and Ford. The result is shown in the dramatic six fold drop in Chrysler's strike frequency shown in Table 2[84] from the 1950s to the 1960s, and here in Table 15, in the ten fold drop in the average annual number of hours lost in strikes per worker:

TABLE 15
CHRYSLER AND GENERAL MOTORS, MAN-HOURS LOST AND LOSS RATES PER HOURLY-PAID WORKER IN UNAUTHORIZED STRIKES, 1950-1969

Five yearly averages	Chrysler Unauthorized man-hrs lost	Hours lost per worker	General Motors[a] Unauthorized man-hrs lost	Hours lost per worker
1950-54	1,644,510	18.6	150,264	.42
1955-59	2,471,528	31.9	257,230	.67
1960-64	81,394	1.28	207,670	.65
1965-69	359,975	3.83	1,194,873	2.93
Annual average 1940-59	1,430,089	18.21	406,525	1.40
1960-79	241,340	2.58	455,495	1.14

SOURCE: Company data.
NOTE: a.GM data not available for 1940, 1941 and 1975. The averages 1940-59 and 1960-79 are therefore calculated on the basis of 18 and 19 years respectively.

GM's authorized strike loss ratio also rose significantly in 1958, as a result of the recession and the joint corporate bargaining strategy of making virtually no concessions in the national contract and then taking on fifteen GM locals over their domestic agreements. But by comparison with Chrysler between 1947 to

84. See Chapter 2 above.

1965. GM's unauthorized strike loss ratio remained at a very low and stable level indeed.[85] 1958 did not mark a decisive organizational shift in the balance of forces at GM.[86]

Edie Fox only returned from an eighteen month lay-off in October 1959. She remembered the dramatic difference workers experienced:

> When I went back into the plant it was a whole new world. Your boss told you: 'This is your production standard. You'd better get it. This is your job. You do it!' You had the time study men there. When they felt like it they would come and time the job. After 1958 it became very dangerous to go on a wildcat.87

In 1959 the number of strikes in Chrysler plants fell to 42; in 1960, when Chrysler again produced a million cars, there were just 17 stoppages recorded by the Corporation. From 1960 to 1965 Chrysler's yearly strike totals were less than those of GM. Labour relations in Chrysler were clearly in a "new world". Managerial authority had been strengthened qualitatively. Fear of managers, superintendents, general foremen and even foremen and of their disciplinary powers had been largely missing from Chrysler workers' subordination to management over the previous twenty years. It now returned. However, even this transformation was qualified: although 1958 saw the removal by management of most of

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85. GM strike data in possession of author. In non-contract-years GM workers lost on average less than thirty minutes each per year from 1947 to 1965.

86. Anderson and Jefferys, op cit, Chapter 12. The conditions which were withdrawn at GM during the period of 'working without a contract' from June to September 1958 were largely restored afterwards.

87. Fox interview.

the restraints Chrysler workers had exercised during the previous 20 years, and the structural basis of the Dodge union tradition was decisively weakened, the influence of that tradition lingered on, carried by isolated individuals into the 1960s.

STEPHEN DAVID JEFFERYS

MARCH 30 1984

PhD THESIS

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CONVERGING INTERESTS?

THE 1960S AND 1970S

The severe recession of 1979-1982 triggered managerial energy on industrial relations on a scale not seen since the onset of mass unionism in the 1930s and 1940s.[1] In 1983 a Harvard professor of business administration, D Quinn Mills, argued confidently that the era of adversarial labour-management relations in which the "'law of the shop' has become more and more burdensome to our economic enterprises"[2] was giving way to an earlier, pre-1930s form of collaborative unionism:

> Fortunately, a concept of collective bargaining that goes beyond rule-making has deep roots in the US labour movement. Before the 1930s, unions ordinarily envisioned themseleves becoming involved in a broad range of problems associated not only with the difficulties of employees on the job, but also with the performance of the business enterprise...It is time to draw on this older tradition of the US labour movement, and leave behind the concept of collective bargaining as primarily a rulemaking process.3

The suggestion of a widespread revival of Sumner Slichter's

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1. Harris lists several late-1970s examples of anit-labour 'business community' behaviour: "The business community's united efforts to defeat the 1978 Labour Law Reform Bill, the NAM's establishment of the Council on a Union-Free Environment, the proliferation of business-sponsored political action committees and 'new right' public policy foundations and overt propaganda agencies, should remind us that the leopard hasn't changed his spots over time, but has merely chosen and been free to pose as a big pussycat"; op cit. 199.

2. D Quinn Mills, "Reforming the United States system of Collective Bargaining", Monthly Labor Review (March 1983), 19.

3. ibid. 21.

"systematic co-operation" can be dismissed as a simple reflection of market behaviour in response to recession. But the rising trend of union certification defeats that began in the mid-1970s and the slow decline in union density through the whole post-war period suggest labour's crisis developed earlier. Explanations cannot ignore the catalytic effect of the two recessions of the 1970s, but they must go beyond unemployment to deeper structural changes.[4]

One symptom of the developing crisis was labour's inability to make inroads into the 75% of unorganized workers. Union membership did grow, especially after 1962 when President Kennedy agreed to allow federal authorities to bargain with unions representing federal employees:[5] according to the National Bureau of Economic Research, the number of union members in 1960 was 15.5 million and by 1975 it had reached 21.1 million. But the total labor force grew faster: the 26.3% union members out of a 59 million civilian labour force in 1960 had slipped to 25.1% of 84 million by 1975. BLS statistics suggest an even greater decline in union density: from 28.9% in 1960 to 23.1% in 1975;[6] and a more recent estimate suggests that union density dropped still more dramatically in the second half of the 1970s, to just

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4. Slichter, op cit, 561.

5. James R Green, The World of the Worker: Labor in Twentieth Century America (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 234. Federal and municipal employees made up most of the increase in union members.

6. Bain and Price, op cit, 89. The percentages in both NBER and BLS series quoted are of 'potential union membership', the civilian non-agricultural labour force.

20.9% of the total labour force by 1980.[7]

Why did American labour fail to grow in the expanding economy of the 1960s and 1970s? In 1960 Clark Kerr, John T Dunlop and two other labour economists predicted:

> We project a future, still long distant, of a world-wide society of pluralistic industrialism: a society where diversity and uniformity still struggle for supremacy and where managers and managed still carry on their endless tug of war; but where the titanic battles which mark our period of transition have already passed into the pages of history.8

Labour conflict, according to Kerr and his equally experienced fellow industrial relations arbitrators and analysts, would eventually be reduced to shadow boxing between the bureaucrats of management and those of the "occupational associations" into which labour unions would eventually evolve:

> Conflict will take place in a system of pluralistic industrialism, but it will take less the form of the open strife or the revolt and more the form of the bureaucratic contest... Persuasion, pressure and manipulation will take the place of the face-to-face combat of an earlier age... The great battles over conflicting manifestos will be replaced by a myriad of minor contests over comparative details.9

The vision was easily dismissed at the time.[10] But from the

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7. George Ruben, "Organized labor in 1981: a shifting of priorities", Monthly Labor Review (January 1982), 26.

8. Clark Kerr, John T Dunlop, Frederick H Harbison, and Charles A Myers, Industrialism and Industrial Man: the problem of labor and management in economic growth (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1960), 2.

9. ibid, 292-3.

10. The book was subjected to penetrating wit and criticism for its blend of neutrality and advocacy of the rise of corporate/industrial man by Hal Draper after Kerr, in his capacity as President of the University of California, sparked off the Berkeley student rebellion in September and October 1964 by trying to obstruct on-campus collections for the civil rights movement: "The Mind of Clark Kerr", New Politics, III, no. 4 (Fall 1964), 51-61.

perspective of 1984, the characterization of bargaining as a "myriad of minor contests over comparative details" conducted usually by non-combatants appears chillingly accurate. In 1982, Ernie Savoie, Ford's Director of Labour Relations, believed their employee involvement schemes were evidence of a qualitative transformation in relations between management and the UAW "top people". In 18 months they had been extended from nine to virtually all Ford's 65 American locations:

> More and more labour and management are coming to accept the fact that their relationship must also include a joint pursuit of their mutual converging interests. I see collective bargaining becoming more open - adding new structures under the collective bargaining umbrella - being more co-operative. These new layers institutionalize the zone of converging interest so that we may legitimize and foster appropriate mutualism in the years ahead.11

Savoie's assessment that "things have changed permanently" cannot be dismissed as wishful thinking. In the close 1982 vote that finally accepted concessions in still-profitable GM, plants with established Quality of Work Life circles were markedly more favourable to concessions than those without.[12]

There is clearly a great deal of evidence to support those who view the 1980s as a new industrial relations era. But to jump straight from 1960 to a corporate Nineteen Eighty-Four would be a mistake. The history of the last two decades contained both a growing accommodation between managerial and union bureaucracies and a radicalization of millions of people demanding greater

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11. Interview with Ernie Savoie, Director, Labour Relations, Ford Motor Company, June 30 1982.

12. Interview with Fred G Haubold, Director, International Labour Relations, General Motors, June 29 1982.

access to full American equality and freedom. Meanwhile the evidence of continued deep managerial hostility to the necessity to consult or bargain with even the most "co-operative" of union leaders' points to a significant residual defensive role still played by American labour. Section one of this chapter provides a background sketch of the 1960s and 1970s; section two considers the issues raised by the Chrysler evidence.

1. Background to the 1960s and 1970s

The long war boom of the 1960s highlighted the inequality and injustice of American capitalism while simultaneously near-full employment and military and political defeat in Southeast Asia made it more vulnerable to domestic pressure for reform. "Titanic battles" did erupt to earn millions of black Americans the civil liberties previously denied them. Opposition to the Vietnam War changed the attitude of a generation of young Americans to the McCarthyite authoritarianism of the 1950s. Women, too, pressed for more freedom, at work as well as in the home. Safe working and living environments came to figure as other important liberties for which many Americans were prepared to struggle.

In 1957 the former Ford Rouge worker and first black UAW international representative, Horace Sheffield, called some other

black Detroit union officers to a meeting in his basement and formed the Trade Union Leadership Council.[13] Three years later, after similar groups had formed in other cities, A Philip Randolph, the veteran socialist and leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, founded the Negro American Labour Council. Randolph opposed separatism but believed black workers should no longer wait for the existing white leaders to set them free:

> While the Negro American Labour Council rejects black nationalism as a doctrine and the practice of racial separation, it recognizes the fact that history has placed upon the Negro and the Negro alone the basic responsibility to complete the uncompleted civil war revolution through keeping the fires of freedom burning in the civil rights movement.[14]

But Randolph's demand that the AFL-CIO act to "eliminate segregation and discrimination within international and local organizations" led to his being censured by the AFL-CIO's Executive Council for promoting "antilabour" views.[15] It would take more than the organization of existing black union officers to finish what Randolph argued the Civil War had begun.

The civil rights movement re-established collective militancy as a legitimate form of action. The Greensboro lunch-counter sit-ins of 1960 gently opened the door; the freedom riders of 1961 and 1962 pushed a little harder. By 1963 even the Kennedy administration, elected on a wafer-thin majority of 118,000 out of 68 million, was ready to acknowledge the need for

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13. "Blacks in Detroit", op cit, 48.

14. Quoted in Foner, op cit, 334.

15. ibid, 335.

legislation to guarantee southern blacks civil rights. And Lyndon B Johnson, the southern Democrat who took over from the assasinated Kennedy in 1963, felt he had to move still faster to exorcise the taint of his political origins.[16] But the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act didn't reduce tension straightaway: the federal government's recognition of certain black demands legitimated the continuing protests and helped to strengthen the movement for change. In 1964 Malcolm X broke with the Black Muslims to advocate active black resistance to racism and capitalism; in 1965 Watts, a black suburb of Los Angeles, erupted in a black rebellion that was echoed in dozens of other uprisings across the United States over the next few years; in 1966 Stokely Carmichael raised the demand for Black Power and the Black Panthers were formed in Oakland, California; in 1967, the biggest black uprising of all occurred in Detroit; and in 1968 Martin Luther King was assassinated in Memphis where he was supporting a strike of black sanitation workers, members of the rapidly-growing municipal workers' union, AFSCME.[17]

In Memphis and in parts of the auto industry the link between the struggle for black rights in society at large and black

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16. Polenberg, op cit, 168, 181-190; he cites Johnson: "I had to produce a civil rights bill that was even stronger than the one they'd have gotten if Kennedy had lived. Without this, I'd be dead before I could ever begin."

17. Green, op cit, 234; Sidney Lens, Radicalism in America (New York: Cromwell, 1969), 369-74.

workers' rights in the workplace is clear. A similar, though less marked connection existed between the Vietnam War and much rank and file discontent in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Not only did hundreds of thousands of young Americans come under the direct influence of the anti-war movement, but many of the hundreds of thousands of Vietnam War veterans returned to work disillusioned with the standard managerial, nationalist and authoritarian ideology. In 1972 the 90% white workforce at the GM plant in Lordstown, Ohio struck the country's most modern assembly plant. Gary Bryner, the young Lordstown UAW local president who ten years later was on the International Executive Board, explained:

> There's a substantial number of people that are Vietnam war vets. They don't come back home wanting to take bullshit from foremen who haven't seen as much of the world as he has, who hasn't seen the hardships.[18]

The role Vietnam played in generalizing the defiant aspects of black resistance to young white workers who were also being drafted into a war they could not identify with, is not quantifiable. But when in 1973 news came over the car radios being fitted on the lines in several Detroit car plants that the Vietcong had entered Saigon, workers began spontaneously hooting and cheering.[19] Like the administration's exposure in the Watergate scandal that led in 1974 to Gerald Ford taking over from Nixon, Vietnam legitimated cynicism about the motives and

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18. Quoted in Studs Terkel, Working, (New York: Avon, 1975), 262.

19. Interview with several Detroit autoworkers, Summer 1975.

morality of those who managed society. In the plants, managers, foremen and older white workers and union officers, brought up on crew cuts and anti-Communism, experienced this disquiet as additional challenges to the legitimacy of their work ethos.

While workplace racism and discipline were both being challenged from below, the wider feminist movement also impacted on workers' rights. Women organized more into unions than before, and both inside and outside unions fought for an extension of women's rights to include paid pregnancy leave, legalized abortion and freedom from sexual harassment. It appeared that "the women's movement stimulated more organizing among clerical workers than the unions had".[20] In the miners' union, John Lewis' successor, Tony Boyle first used the 'anti-gangster' 1959 Landrum-Griffin Act to place 19 of the UMW's 23 districts under his direct control. Then, in 1969, he ordered his principal opponent to be murdered in a bid to stay in power. The movement that finally unseated him was born out of a campaign for mine safety spearheaded by the rank and file Black Lung Association.[21]

It is difficult to estimate the size of these opposition

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20. Green [1980], op cit, 240.

21. Guerin, op cit, 238-9; Green [1980], 243-5.

movements.[22] In an earlier period, they might have created permanent organizations or a unitary political expression of their radicalism.[23] But the unevenness of this radicalization between blacks and white, women and men, blue and white collar workers, metropolitan and smaller urban and rural areas, presented considerable difficulty in cementing organization around any particular generalization. So did the retention - often, as in the case of the miners, accompanying industrial militancy - of a powerful anti-Communism. Behind these political obstacles were economic and social ones. In the 1960s and early 1970s these minorities faced an economy whose growth allowed certain limited reforms, employers whose economic power was now truly global and a union tradition that, while it was patently better than nothing, had been battered into a conservative passivity.[24]

The longer-term redistributive and demobilizing impact of the

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22. Estimates of participants are difficult because these movements operated within legal frameworks that appeared to tolerate limited demonstrations of spontaneous anger and solidarity only before their unions were recognized. So it usually took considerable courage to stand up and be counted at work: Staughton Lynd, "Workers' control in a Time of Diminished Workers' Rights", Radical America 10, no.5 (September-October 1976), 6; Yet enough did for the 'labour revolt' to become a noted feature of recent history: Green [1980], op cit, 218; Brecher, op cit, 329.

23. Greer draws a parallel between the victory of the 1967 black coalition in Gary, Indiana, and the victory of the multiethnic New Deal coalition in 1934; op cit, 33.

24. In a critique of Brecher's Strike, David Montgomery accepts that for many American workers, "nothing corrupts like powerlessness"; but he argues equally that others have a different experience and that "For the last century the union, even in some of its worst forms, has provided a shield behind which workers of no more that average aggressiveness have found both emancipation from the bonds of subservience to the bourgeois order and a link between themselves and their more forceful shopmates", "Spontaneity and Organization: Some Comments", Radical America 7, no.6 (November-December 1973), 71.

New Frontier and Great Society reforms of 1963 to 1965 should not be under-estimated.[25] By the mid-1970s the black middle class was larger, wealthier and more geograpically dispersed than ever before. Its job opportunities no longer lay exclusively within the black ghettos.[26] For those who hadn't made it, federal and city poverty programs, food stamps and welfare payments allowed life without the hunger of the 1930s: in 1982 a third of the adult population of Detroit survived on welfare.[27] A safety net had been provided. Those in work faced another problem: for the first time the US fully entered the world market as a major importer of consumer goods. The logic of world-wide competition finally began to dawn on American workers who found their labour relations executives, like Ford's Savoie in 1977 and Chrysler's Clancy in 1980, making pilgrimages to Japan. In many cases, the corporations paid for delegations of international officers to go, too. The organizational independence from management maintained by post-war business unionism was rapidly eroded when the unions agreed to reduce wage costs.

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25. Polenberg argues that "the years after 1963 witnessed the most powerful surge of social reform since the New Deal", detailing "legislation in the fields of medical care, education, housing, civil rights, poverty and immigration", op cit, 173, 181-207.

26. ibid, 276-8.

27. Michigan Department of Social Services, "Monthly Trend Report of Key DSS Statistics: May 1982", (Detroit: Data Reporting Section, June 25 1982), Table 1a.

Labour's independent organizing ability grew weaker during the 1960s and 1970s as a result of three linked developments: the 1955 reunion of the AFL and CIO strengthened the narrower, more conservative leadership and tradition of the older craft-based movement at the expense of any remaining combatative industrial unionism; federal governments intervened more frequently in industrial conflicts and in wage settlements while labour's political clout waned; and instead of harnessing the groundswell of radicalism to strengthen unionism, international officers made common cause with management to suppress it. The AFL-CIO had decided to launch a massive new organizing drive at its founding convention: it never happened. Meany's view on devoting resources to union organizing was: "We've done quite well without it."[28] George Meany, who headed the new federation, told the National Association of Manufacturers in 1956:

> I never went on a strike in my life, I never ordered anyone else to run a strike in my life, I never had anything to do with the picket line... In the final analysis, there is not a great deal of difference between the things I stand for and the things that the National Association of Manufacturers stands for.[29]

A practising conservative until his retirement in 1979, Meany steered the AFL-CIO into a close relationship with successive federal governments. In 1972, President Richard Nixon

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28. Quoted in 1972 by Kim Moody and Jim Woodward, Battle Line: the Coal Strike of '78 (Detroit: Sun, 1978) 110.

29. Cited in Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, Detroit: I do mind dying. A study in urban revolution (New York: St Martin's Press, 1975), 39.

appointed New York construction union leader Peter Brennan as Labour Secretary.[30] This followed ten years of growing federal government intervention in wage bargaining and labour conflict. Kennedy persuaded Meany to endorse pay controls in 1962, and a decade later Nixon did the same.[31] But the principal mechanism government used to influence the conduct of labour relations, besides negotiating with its own employees, was the invoking of Taft-Hartley. Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon and, in 1978, Carter all used Taft-Hartley against workers whose demands and threats of industrial action could have triggered more general labour unrest. And what the federal governmemt didn't finish, the courts did. In the early 1970s the Nixon appointees-dominated Supreme Court and various lower courts significantly reduced workers' rights.[32] Brennan was a token: the AFL-CIO's political clout had virtually disappeared. Despite the election of the Carter administration in 1976 together with the largest congressional Democratic majority since 1964, the well-organized opposition of business interests in Washington easily defeated the AFL-CIO's Labour Law Reform Bill in 1978. Lane Kirkland, soon to succeed Meany, was outraged. He accused the employers of mounting "class warfare" and warned that industry's resistance to the proposals to assist union

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30. Guerin, op cit, 231.

31. ibid, 196, 201, 228.

32. Lynd, op cit, 7-9, lists ten areas in which court decisions limited the already narrow definition of workers' rights created by the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947.

organizing "may well mark a crossroad in the future of relations between labour and management in this country".[33] Doug Fraser of the UAW, then still outside the AFL-CIO, directed his attack on GM's role in the successful filibuster.[34] The AFL-CIO and the UAW were clearly incapable of mobilising congressional majorities for demands affecting the independent interests of working people. If it was a question that affected mutual interests of union and management, things might be different. The UAW appeared next at Congress to campaign for federal funds to bail out Chrysler, and in the early 1980s it headed a drive to limit Japanese car imports that got some quiet support from Ford and Chrysler. The AFL-CIO still had the strength to mobilise half a million union members to protest in the streets of Washington DC in November 1981, but it could not - or did not wish to - lift a finger for the PATCO air traffic controllers sacked by Reagan who also marched on Solidarity Day.

In 1981, Fraser reaffiliated the auto workers' union to the AFL-CIO. Like the closure of ranks between the leaderships of the AFL and CIO in 1955, this was symbolic. For Reuther had withdrawn the UAW from the AFL-CIO in 1969 after clashes with Meany over the absence of democracy within the federation and the refusal to

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33. Quoted in Moody and Woodward, op cit, 123.

34. See Chapter 16 below.

countenance a serious struggle against the government or the employers to strengthen union organization.[35] Labour's failure to grow in an economy that was expanding rapidly was bad enough. But when the economy entered recession labour's lack of dynamism became catastrophic: business unionism had no other path to take than still closer collaboration with employers now more determined than ever to curtail labour's 'rule-making' role - whether those rules were made in negotiations in corporate offices with international officers or on the shop floor. The UAW's return to the AFL-CIO confirmed that times had changed. First Reuther and then Meany had died. More significantly, the UAW had also finally abandoned any pretence that it could harness the radical energy of the late 1960s and early 1970s into massive new growth in union membership.

The re-emergence of nearly total homogeneity of perspective among union leaders and the defeat or stalemating of opposition movements among the postal workers, miners, steelworkers and teamsters by the late 1970s was a reversal for the radicalism of the previous fifteen years. It helped to isolate those who wished to resist. The defeat dovetailed with growing job insecurity and a new resurgence of American nationalism with the Iranian hostage crisis of 1979-80. Reagan's 1980 election victory, the passive toleration of mass unemployment and the rash

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35. Guerin, op cit, 214-223.

of concession contracts in the 1979-82 recession all followed. By the first quarter of 1982 the 66 major contracts covering 965,000 workers showed a median wage gain of zero, for the first time since the BLS started keeping contract records in the late 1940s. In the concession-pacemaker, auto, strikes virtually disappeared and absenteeism rates, a measure of the confidence of the individual worker, also collapsed:[36]

Absenteeism Rate

	Chrysler	Ford	General Motors
1979	7.3%	3.9%	9.2%
1980	5.9%	3.0%	9.4%
1981	5.6%	2.4%	9.6%
1982*	5.1%	2.1%	8.0%

*January to June

The argument here is not that rank and file resistance halted. Solidarity with miners defying Taft-Hartley in 1978 was more widespread than for any other national strike since the 1940s.[37] But resistance has been disorganized: the declining power of institutional unionism vis-a-vis the employers has not been compensated for in growing power in the hands of ordinary workers.

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36. Company data, Detroit Free Press, August 9 1982.

37. Moody and Woodward, op cit, 58-9, describe how in Detroit several auto union locals started to organize collections in mid-February 1978 - to be followed two weeks later by Fraser announcing a national donation from the UAW to the UMW.

II. Issues

This part of the study addresses a paradox in Chrysler's exceptionalism. The auto maker with the highest level of worker-management conflict between 1938 and 1979 became the first to secure UAW agreement to concessions that froze workers' wages for two years and took away promised benefits. This turnaround took place as rapidly as had the earlier hiatus of the late 1950s. Within a year of the 1977 strike frequency peak, and for the first time since the early 1930s, as Table 16 shows, strikes virtually disappeared:

TABLE 16
CHRYSLER STRIKES, STRIKE FREQUENCY AND HOURLY-PAID EMPLOYMENT, 1977-1980

Year	Number of strikes		Strike frequency		Hourly-paid workforce	
	Unauthorized	Authorized	All strikes	% change	(000s)	% change
1977	76	18	.941	+ 72.3	99.9	+ 2.9
1978	13	2	.156	- 83.4	95.9	- 4
1979	9	5	.186	+ 19.2	75.4	- 21.4
1980	3	0	.058	- 68.8	51.6	- 31.6

SOURCE: Company data.

In 1979 and 1980 workers' fears of company bankruptcy or plant closures or both clearly created such a degree of insecurity that strike action (and other forms of open resistance to managerial authority as well) became "illegitimate" in the eyes not only of management, the UAW and the courts, but also in the commonsense consciousness of virtually the entire workforce.

Some important questions of interpretation are raised by the juxtaposition of the late-1960s/early 1970s 'labour revolt' sketched above and the onset of concession-bargaining. This section first outlines some objections to the application in this period of the Gordon, Edwards and Reich labour-control-by-segmentation theory, and then discusses the workers' contribution to the crisis and the contribution of the crisis to the reorganization of the relationship of management to managed.

Gordon, Edwards and Reich see the 'labour revolt' as "an unravelling of the postwar truce" and as a confirmation of the historical correlation of 'long-wave' economic cycles and managerial control strategies. They also link the 'labour revolt' with an extension of bargaining to 'non-economic' issues.[38] And finally, they arrive at the "stronger conclusion" that "the gradual erosion of the postwar labour truce...constitutes a principal source of the well-known slowdown in productivity growth in the US economy".[39] Their thesis relies heavily on a sharp discontinuity between the 'labour revolt' and the earlier post-war years, on its widespread significance, and on its unambiguous support for the view that management's chosen control mechanism, at least in the 1960s, was labour segmentation. But all these assumptions are highly questionable.

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38. Gordon et al, op cit, 220.

39. ibid, 219.

It has become a commonplace to assume that the 'labour revolt' was both new and widespread without testing the evidence properly.[40] Impressions and aspirations have often overtaken more sober judgment about this period in much the same way levels of active participation in the mass unionizing movement of the 1930s have been exaggerated.[41] Paul Edwards and Peter Nolan recently presented BLS data showing that strikes over plant issues in the transport equipment industry (primarily auto) declined as a proportion of all strikes from the 1960s to the 1970s, as did the proportion of strikes taking place during the term of a contract:[42]

Transport Equipment Industry

Year	strikes during term of contract as %	strikes over plant issues as %	Year	Strikes during term of contract as %	strikes over plant issues as %
1961	41.2	45.4	1970	40.9	35.2
1962	32.0	38.0	1971	27.1	28.9
1963	52.0	51.0	1972	26.3	26.7
1964	47.5	44.2	1973	26.3	26.9
1965	44.3	41.0	1974	15.7	20.8
1966	48.1	39.8	1975	19.0	31.4
1967	34.7	43.7	1976	17.7	24.6
1968	37.1	42.0	1977	10.6	13.8
1969	43.3	38.9	1978	9.4	11.4

40. See the discussion of "labour revolts" in R Herding, op cit, 255-319.

41. Paul Edwards recently explained this 1970s' "over-emphasis on the radical possibilities of rank and file action and a corresponding lack of concern with its limits and the resilience of the institutionalized system" as a "reaction against the complacency" of the 1950s and early 1960s; Edwards, P K [1981], op cit, 217.

42. Peter Nolan and P K Edwards, "Homogenise, divide and rule: an essay on 'Segmented work, divided workers'", (Warwick: SSRC Industrial Relations Research Unit, unpublished paper, December 1982), Table 3, 26.

To the extent that any firm conclusions can be drawn on the basis of BLS-counted strikes, the data suggests there was no sharp discontinuity in the level of mid-term strikes (generally accepted as largely unauthorized) or of plant-issue strikes (generally viewed as 'non-economic') from 1961 to 1970 and that subsequently both rapidly declined. This contradicts the unsubstantiated general assertions made by Gordon, Edwards and Reich about rising unauthorized and 'non-economic' "militance" after the mid-1960s in auto.[43] But the detailed evidence of a two-fold rise in company-counted strikes in Chrysler and a five-fold rise in GM in the following chapters balances the national statistics. Together, the two series suggest not a great national labour revolt symptomatic of a shift in the balance of class power, but piecemeal, local and isolated resistance. It will be argued that a fragmented rank and file movement did erupt in the first part of this period, but it did not succeed in making permanent inroads in the existing managerial control system. And its defeat by management working with the international union helped prepare the ground for concession bargaining.

It is worth reflecting on evidence of a shift to 'non-economic' bargaining, even if strikes about such questions did not occur more frequently. For it does not follow that an

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43. Gordon et al, ibid, 220.

"extension of bargaining" to issues such as health and safety or to the number of pay phone booths accessible to workers creates restraints on managerial authority. To understand this it is important to disentangle the positive impact of collective organization on managerial authority over the labour process, the technology, organization and pace of work, from other areas of management decision. Improving the work environment does create extra 'efficiency' costs for management. But although the local may bargain about these, they cannot be directly attributed to labour's struggled-for restraints against managerial authority. And in meeting such costs management may act similarly to companies which do not collectively bargain on them. Equally, the extra costs to management of providing federal safety checks and workers' compensation and insurance legislation, or of expectations of racial and sexual equality, are essentially 'social' restraints. Although their detailed implementation is often bargained over, the source of what then become restraints on management decision-making is not direct union strength.[44] A revolt against a specific production standard, by contrast, may cost management little to concede, but it ultimately challenges its authority.

The line between restraints on management decisions about the work environment and restraints on managerial authority over the work process can be blurred, but the eclipse of the latter by

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44. Goodrich, op cit, 54.

the former explains observations about the "changing dimensions of worker militance". The new "dimensions" were not of greater "militance" as Gordon, Edwards and Reich imply, but of less. Nor can the shift in the scope of bargaining be seen as signs of a new, higher-level challenge to managerial power.[45] The rise in environmental efficiency and social bargaining should be seen as a continuum. What began with management extending a negotiating role on small issues to local officers who could no longer bargain over the labour process, developed in the recession of the late 1970s into the establishment of quality circles and a major decline in combativity.

This suggestion of a fairly consistent management control strategy in the "core" auto industry operating from the 1940s through to the 1980s does not fit the Gordon, Edwards and Reich analysis:

> We have already noted that the world economy began sliding into sustained economic crisis in the early 1970s. Our analytical framework would therefore lead us to expect a corresponding decay in the prevailing structure of labour management, gradually eroding the organization of the labour process and labour markets that characterized the post-World War II US economy.46

Far from their labour management strategies decaying in the late 1970s, Chrysler, Ford and GM used the recession to enhance managerial authority over the labour process. They could do so because they had successfully disorganized the resistance spawned

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45. Stephen Hill, Competition and Control at Work: The New Industrial Sociology (London: Heinemann, 1981), 169-173.

46. Gordon et al, op cit, 215

by the tight labour market of the 1960s. Auto industry management had not operated a labour segmentation control strategy before the 1960s, preferring to rely on unsophisticated, old-fashioned "drive". So when rapid growth forced it to renew its labour force in the 1960s it simply kept pressing the black and young white workers until they could be "driven" too. From the 1930s to the early 1970s, racism was used frequently by management to maintain divisions between workers. But neither this nor the ghettoization of blacks and women in a large low-paid service sector in the national economy was crucial for auto industry managerial authority.

The substantial post-war numbers of black auto workers present another problem for Gordon, Edwards and Reich. They are forced to concede: "Some blacks continued to work in the core manufacturing industries. For example, black employment in steel, automobiles and mining increased from 142,000 in 1940 to 204,000 in 1960", and "during the 1960s some of these patterns began to change slightly" so that "black employment in the core goods industries increased from 502,000 in 1960 to 682,000 in 1970."[47] But since this upsets their general hypothesis of a neat privileged-underprivileged, white-black division of material interests, giving rise to unimpeded managerial authority, the problem of how labour is controlled in auto assembly plants with a

47. Gordon et al, op cit, 206-210.

majority of black workers is simply ignored. So is much evidence to suggest that American labour was certainly not more divided on lines of race, ethnicity and sex by 1970 than between 1910 and 1940, the Gordon, Reich and Edwards' period of labour "homogeneity".[48] The lack of applicability of their theory to the auto industry is unfortunate. Labour market segmentation is an important concept because, in Michael Piore's words, it "basically asserts that, in large territories of the labour market, job allocation and pricing are governed by institutional rules and customs which are only tenuously linked to rational, instrumental behavior or to competitive market forces, if they are so linked at all...At the core of labour market segmentation are social groups and institutions".[49] And - as a description of how the economic system works - this is clearly more sensible than most macro-economic models. But, as John Humphrey's study of the Brazilian auto industry has shown for an economy with considerably greater extremes of wealth and poverty than the United States, evidence of differentiation in the working class does not prove that differentiation itself is the central or a

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48. Polenberg, op cit, 250, 291-2; Marwick, op cit, 362.

49. Michael J Piore, "Labor market segmentation theory: critics should let the paradigm evolve", Monthly Labor Review (April 1983), 28.

major control mechanism, or that it inhibits worker resistance.

The absence of proof for somewhat cavalier assertions is also characteristic of the Gordon, Edwards and Reich approach to the mid and late 1970s' recessions. Their argument that the labour revolt was "a principal source" of declining growth rates in the 1970s is not as strident as the verdict of one historian that "structural features of British trade unionism and collective bargaining have played an important role in the progressive decline of the British economy"[51]; but both echo the analysis of standard management thought.[52] The issue is especially important for Chrysler workers, since the argument here is that they held on to greater restraints over managerial authority longer than workers at Ford and GM; and Chrysler went bust first. If a protracted labour revolt in Chrysler caused major productivity problems then it appears logical that the late 1960s/early 1970s national revolt could have had such an effect nationally.

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50. John Humphrey, Capitalist Control and workers' Struggle in the Brazilian Auto Industry (Princeton, New jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), 230-1; he views the principal errors as "reductionism and mere description" which are "...often combined in analyses which pass from description and voluntaristic accounts of the development of events and organizations to the mechanistic attribution of such developments to underlying structural characteristics of the class"; 245.

51. Jonathan Zeitlin, "Workplace organization in the British Car Industry: a review", History Workshop, 10,(Autumn 1980). This argument is challenged by Dave Lyddon, "Workshop organization in the British car industry: a critique of Jonathan Zeitlin, History Workshop, 15 (Spring 1983).

52. Slichter, Healey and Livernash made the same observation in the recession of the late 1950s: "It is clear that certain plants and companies have become non-competitive not through concessions granted in negotiations but through the cumulative effect of concessions granted in contract administration"; op cit, 663.

Struggled-for restraints in the mid-1950s did exert an influence on Chrysler management, persuading it to rely more than GM or Ford on recruitment to raise output. Yet even then most responsibility for its low output per worker was at management's door: Chrysler was building larger, more complicated cars with less new investment than its rivals. But after the labour relations watershed of 1957-59, car output per head at Chrysler moved in line with Ford and GMs for ten years, rising with the expansion of new car plants and then falling as demand exceeded the maximum output of existing facilities. When Chrysler production rose to over a million cars in 1963 and to a plateau of just under 1.5 million between 1965 and 1969, the new workers found no remaining custom and practice agreements they could relate to. Previously each sustained boom period since the 1920s had seen a significant advance in shop floor restraints on managerial autonomy. But although in the auto industry as a whole there is some evidence that workers' poor job motivation, especially in the boom years, still exerted a negative impact on worker performance (labour costs and productivity),[53] in the 1960s shop floor working conditions did not improve. Then, in the 1970s, Chrysler's output per worker moved out of synchronization again: declining with its growing financial crisis and lack of investment to 1978 and rising again with widespread lay-offs,

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53. J R Norsworthy and Craig A Zabala "Worker Attitude, Worker Performance, and Productivity", (Washington DC: Bureau of the Census, September 1983), mimeographed, 19-20.

the start of plant closures, and crisis-invigorated managerial authority.[54] In this period, Chrysler's pattern of labour relations first closed dramatically to the industry norm and then became a pattern-setter. The 'norm' it approached and overtook was not marked by any "declining effectiveness" of the dominant managerial control system but, if anything, by a system of managerial authority more independent of collective worker restraint in the late 1970s than at any time since the 1930s. Chrysler workers' independent impact on business policy cannot be held responsible for the company's falling productivity and bankruptcy.

Not surprisingly, then, control of the labour process did not obsess Chrysler management in the 1960s as it had during the two preceding decades: both productivity and profits broke record after record. Of much greater significance to the Chrysler chiefs, Lynn Townsend (1960-75) and John Riccardo (1975-79) were volume production figures and international expansion: accountants by profession, they wanted and, in the 1960s, got healthy looking balance sheets. Lee Iacocca (1979 to date) had the task of piecing together the company which their years of mishandled international expansion, weak product judgment and 'fast buck' business strategies had finally bankrupted. In the recession of 1957-58, management had targetted labour resistance as its main enemy. But in 1978-79 Iacocca's priorities were: management structure,

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54. See above, Figure 6.

Chrysler business strategy and labour costs. The evidence suggests management did not see labour resistance as a major component of declining growth in the 1970s. But while the workers' contribution to the crisis was negligible, it did not follow that the crisis had little impact on the workers.

A new balance of forces was shaped on the Detroit labour market as Chrysler's hourly paid workforce declined slightly between 1977 and 1978 and then collapsed in 1979 and 1980. Unemployment in the City of Detroit rose from 8.3% in 1978 to 10.3% in 1979 and 16.5% in 1980, with unemployment among blacks who made up the majority of Chrysler's Detroit workforce rising from 11.7% to 26.8% over the same period.[55] The old aphorism could be justifiably reworked: when Chrysler gets a cold, the City of Detroit gets pneumonia.[56]

The 'business cycle' argument alone doesn't explain why the slight 9% fall in Chrysler's car production in 1978 and 4% fall in employment should have been accompanied by such a dramatic 83% decline in strike frequency. This collapse, one year before the major production and employment decline, was the result of the international UAW and Chrysler management defeating or

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55. Bureau of Research and Statistics, Unemployment rates by race, 1965-1981, (Detroit: Michigan Employment Security Commission).

56. The national rise in auto industry unemployment rose a year later than at Chrysler. In 1978 unemployment in the US automobile industry as a whole was still only 4.1%, up a mere 0.2% on 1977; it then rose to 7.4% in 1979 and only jumped to chronic levels with the onset of the national economic recession after August 1979, to reach an average of 20.3% in 1980. US Department of Labour, Bureau of Labour Statistics. March 16 1981.

incorporating their black opposition over the previous five years. Once the tradition of rank and file struggle was no longer available to legitimize new resistance, collective expressions of anger outside the procedure became significantly more difficult to organize. To assert that the economic crisis causes a decline in worker combativity does not explain why and how." The argument below will stress the significance of workers' collective organizations in projecting either fatalism or independent alternatives. Structural factors such as the level of employment are clearly very important in determining shop floor consciousness. But the conscious activity of management and managed also play a part.

III. Structure

Chapter 13 considers the early 1960s when the legacy from the 1950s impacted on both management and shop floor organization. Chapter 14 traces the origins of growing instability in labour relations in the mid-1960s and the impact of the politics of 'civil rights' on the shop floor. Chapter 15 considers the emergence in 1968 of the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement, a black shopfloor militant organization, and its eventual defeat by the joint forces of management and the international UAW. Chapter 16 argues that workplace legitimacy was already being redefined in Chrysler plants well before the onset of the world-wide auto recession of 1979. Chapter 17 examines how managerial changes and Chrysler's near-bankruptcy led to the closure of Dodge Main and concession-bargaining.

CHAPTER 13

WHITE-SHIRTED STRANGERS

THE EARLY 1960s

Chapter 13 looks first at the changes that took place in Chrysler management personnel between 1960 and 1962, and at the consequences for its business and operational strategies. Section two considers the workers' response: an initial turn to the left at Dodge Main followed by the failure of the left administration to prevent the continued erosion of the old system of mutual rule-making. Section three considers the accelerated process of underlying change in the role of the stewards in the new harsher labour relations climate of the 1960s. Finally, section four explains how these elements interacted to allow the re-emergence of Reutherite control over Local 3.

I. Management changes

Management underwent a transformation as a result of the traumatic recession of 1958-59. In April 1960, after Chrysler's market share had fallen below 14% in both 1958 and 1959, Colbert stepped down as president and chose William C Newberg, who had started with Chrysler in 1933 and was seen as a Colbert protege,

to take that post. Soon afterwards Colbert, who retained the chairmanship, sacrificed Newberg when it became public knowledge he had major stock holdings in certain of Chrysler's suppliers. Newberg then turned on Colbert, who resumed the presidency, and told the 1961 AGM: "We can never again have a strong Chrysler under the Czarist rule of Mr Colbert."[1] With Chrysler's internal management squabbles public, Colbert tried unsuccessfully to recruit an outsider to take the presidency. In July 1961, the board appointed the 42-year-old accountant, Lynn A Townsend, who had worked for Chrysler only since 1957.[2] In September 1961, George H Love, chairman of the Pittsburgh-based Consolidation Coal Company and the giant Cleveland-based M A Hanna investment trust, took over as chairman.[3] Consolidation Coal then commissioned the industrial consultants, Loomis, Sayles & Company, to conduct a new study of Chrysler. They openly condemned the old Chrysler "family" management: "In recent years, inept management has hurt the company's competitive position and adversely affected earnings." But they went on to argue that with the right top management Chrysler could get back on the tracks, and so Consolidation Coal, the industry's largest coal

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1. Moritz and Seaman, op cit, 62.

2. Stuart, op cit, 64-67. Townsend had been the Detroit outside accountant responsible for the Chrysler account at Touche, Ross & Co. from 1947 until 1957 when Colbert appointed him Chrysler controller following the death after brain surgery of the former vice president for finance.

3. ibid. 68. He had only served on Chrysler's Board of Directors since 1958, but was an important bridge to Rockefeller interests.

consortium, purchased a block of Chrysler stock.[4]

While Keller and Colbert had acquired their managerial skills within the autocratic, conservative Chrysler managerial tradition, the take-over by Townsend and Love established a new breed of professional manager. The two top men had only a few years' experience of the auto industry.[5] But as financial controller from 1957 to 1960, Townsend brought Chrysler's financial control systems into line with Ford and GM's. He had bought up financial experts from Ford and introduced a cost-control programme that made it possible to evaluate the impact of the new man assignments operating on the shop floor and a current-profit plan that allowed the daily control of costs and operations. He also introduced capital-investment and forward-cost control programmes.[6] To mark his arrival as president, Townsend drew up the company's first organizational chart,[7] and quickly released the brake on

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4. ibid, 68-9.

5. Love, for example, was quoted as saying, "I don't know what a carburettor is, and I'm too old to learn." But Townsend and Love did know that Chrysler was unmanageable as long as no-one knew exactly how much it cost them to make a carburettor; Moritz and Seaman, op cit, 63. They go on to describe Townsend and his new team as coming from "a generation that had attended the business schools endowed with the riches of the founding fathers of American enterprise. They were the bushy-tailed MBAs who had long been drilled that what was good for American business was certainly good for them."

6. ibid, 69.

7. ibid, 71.

the earlier McKinsey report's advice to expand overseas.[8] By the end of 1962, Time called Chrysler "the comeback story of US business" and put Townsend's face on its front cover with the headline, "Towards a World Market".[9]

This rapid and internally disruptive transition to outside management was not, however, a total change in management style or structure. Chrysler's old centralized 'rimless wheel' model of management actually survived: all key decisions were referred to the center, Chrysler's nine-man Operations Committee, which was dominated by Townsend, who was as autocratic and secretive as previous top executives.[10] Townsend revolutionized Chrysler's business strategy. From being a manufacturing company that produced well-engineered and often original cars and counted on customer loyalty to get them sold, it now focused on salesmanship, leaving the styling boundaries of Chrysler cars to be laid down by

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8. Chrysler's total non-US and Canada employment rose from 4,763 in 1962 to 24,046 in 1963 with the increase in its 1958 25% share of Simca, France to 64% and the acquisition of a 40% share of Barreiros Diesel, Spain. Between 1964 and 1967 Chrysler took over Rootes Motors; in 1964 it established Chrysler Peru; in 1965 it bought up the Argentinian company, Fevre y Basset, and the Columbian company Fabrica Colombiana; in 1966 it acquired the Brazilian Simca subsidiary. By 1967 its worldwide employment outside the US and Canada was 75,600, a figure equivalent to 60% of its average US employment. Between 1962 and 1967 its vehicle sales outside the US and Canada rose from 75,778 to 588,163, and its net overseas assets from $73m to $482. Chrysler Corporation, Facts, 12-15.

9. ibid, 70. Time, never an introspective magazine returned to the theme of "Detroit's comeback kid" on March 21 1983, when it featured the current Chrysler success story of a recovery spear-headed by Lee Iacocca.

10. One illustration of this was Townsend's 1964 decision to hire a New York publicity agency to come up with a fresh corporate image - the blue and white pentastar - which was taken, at a cost of $50 million, without consulting his top associates; Stuart, op cit, 70-71.

GM. Townsend introduced major warranty guarantees (5 years or 50,000 miles) in 1962 - eventually forcing Ford and GM to follow suit in 1966 - and in 1964 followed GM and Ford by establishing a credit company, Chrysler Financial. He also encouraged diversification from exclusive dependence on car sales and encouraged Chrysler Realty, originally established to assist Chrysler dealers buy well-situated sites, to enter big-time land speculation. Other areas of diversification included a Chemical Products Group, Airtemp, the air conditioning equipment manufacturer, marine engines and boats, and the Chrysler Space Division.[11]

Townsend's innovations with the biggest knock-on effect on day-to-day operations were his decision to follow GM and Ford into every sector of the increasingly segmented car market of the 1960s and to build in advance of firm orders. The first decision meant that rather than concentrating on three or four sections of the market, Chrysler multiplied its model range and the choice of options within each model range. In 1962, before Townsend's influence began to make itself felt on Chrysler's product lines, the company offered 93 different styles; just five years later it was producing 160.[12] Since its manufacturing base was much smaller

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11. ibid, 73-80.

12. ibid, 102.

than its rivals, Chrysler's stamping plants had to produce shorter runs and change dies more often than Ford and GM, and to have many more mix changes on the assembly lines.[13] The model proliferation meant less economies of scale than for Chrysler's competitors and more tension on the shop floor, where shorter runs and constant changes in job descriptions aggravated underlying tensions. Townsend's second significant operational decision, to build up a sales bank rather than shut production, was taken ostensibly to ensure a quicker delivery of cars to the dealers. In reality, it was to avoid additional rising overheads (for plant maintenance and SUB for laid-off workers) and to boost the top executives' bonuses that were directly related to factory production rather than final sales volumes. In 1966 the bank was allowed to grow to 60,000 units, and then it became institutionalized, swelling to 408,302 in February 1969[14] - 29% of the year's total sales. This focus on volume rather than quality or lower labour costs, led to Chrysler's 1960s employment explosion and to a particular sharpening of the intensity of work as front-line management was told to keep the line moving by sheer pressure on the workers. This fuelled a new shop floor combativity even before the earlier tradition could finally be pronounced dead.

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13. Interview with Dick Clancy, July 28 1982.

14. Stuart, op cit, 107-109.

II. Union opposition

It took longer for Chrysler's new labour relations strategy to be fully legitimated in the eyes of the union activists than it did to implement the top-down changes within management. Initially, the hostility of union activists to the new procedures and pressures carried the day. But the gap between the activists' rhetoric and the reality of life on the shop floor gradually eroded the credibility of most of the 1950s layer of activists.

Left turn

When sizeable numbers of production workers were called back to Dodge Main late in 1959, they were outraged by the new working conditions. In January 1960, the UAW's Chrysler Department Director, Norman Matthews, scheduled a tour of the plant with Local 3 officers after hearing "repeated complaints by rank and file members charging management with imposing inhuman work assignments, chiseling on negotiated agreements and supervisors constantly performing hourly rated workers' jobs."[15] This last complaint became a constant feature in the 1960s as Chrysler vastly increased the strength of its first line supervision. One estimate suggested that the ratio of foremen to production workers before 1958 was one to every 75 or 80 workers, while

15. DMN January 16 1960.

afterwards it was one to every 20 or 25 workers.[16] Certainly, the proportion of Chrysler's salaried company's workers to total employment rose significantly from an average of 28.2% in the five year period 1955-59 to 32.7% over 1960-64.[17]

In May 1960 unit elections throughout Dodge Main resulted in the election as chief stewards of the former members of the 1957 'Rank and File' caucus, like Edith Fox for District 7 of the trim department and Ed Liska in the body-in-white.[18] And one month later, Steve Pasica, the plant committee chairman and a founder member of the left Blue Slate in 1950 who had supported the veteran Pat Quinn for president in 1956 and 1958, defeated Quinn on a new militant "Gray Slate".[19] This election marked the end of the old right versus left, green slate against blue slate electoral contests that had dominated the 1950s. Pasica had been

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16. DMN, May 14 1966.

17. Company data. At Ford, by contrast, the proportion of salaried staff to total employment rose by just one per cent, from 29.6% in 1955-59 to an average of 30.6% during 1960-64. The 4% rise at Chrysler is all the more indicative of a sharp increase in supervision since one of the first acts of the new Administrative Vice President, Lynn Townsend, in December 1960, was to dismiss 7,000 white collar workers, some 15% of the total salaried work force; Stuart, op cit, 67.

18. Liska interview; DMN May 21 1960. Most of the 1957 'Rank and File' caucus activists had been laid off from January 1958 to October or November 1959, and so had not been in a position to run in the 1958 local elections. Each unit at Dodge held its own elections for unit officers and committee chairpersons, chief stewards and their alternates, one month before the Local elections. The Trim Unit elected 7 officers, 11 standing committee chairpersons and 15 stewards and alternates on the two shifts.

19. DMN June 4 1960. 7,659 workers voted in this election, approximately 60% of the workforce. Subsequently a trend to smaller turnouts for local officers' elections developed as the relationship between local officers and the membership grew increasingly distant. This 1960 election also saw the first woman, Edith van Horn, elected as a Local 3 officer, although only as Trustee.

Quinn's principal lieutenant, but felt Quinn was too dependent upon Reuther and too compromised by the 1958 agreement to be able to mount a new campaign against the speed-up. After losing, Quinn made his peace with Reuther rather than return to work. He told Frank Marquart, "Walter offered me a job in the International; he knew damn well that if I went back in the shop, I'd stir things up... I'll be frank; we got bought off."[20] Many Dodge workers felt he had been "bought off" some time before.[21] It was a common occurrence in the UAW in the 1960s for a local officer incumbent who lost office because of his defence of Reuther's line to end up on the international staff - and it encouraged local officers to distance themselves from their members whenever there was a conflict of interest between the members and the international.

At first, Pasica attempted to maintain the old tradition by pressing for a tough line against the new attendance procedure and in the 1961 national contract negotiations on production standards. During the shut-down before the introduction of the 1961 models, the Labour Relations department unilaterally imposed a formal procedure to standardise sanctions against workers who took unauthorized time off. This "offence" could no longer

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20. Marquart, op cit, 132.

21. Liska, Fox interviews.

be left to the accident of shop floor relations between a foreman and a worker. So a standard escalation of sanctions was imposed: verbal warning, written warning, one-day lay-off, three-day lay-off, five-day lay-off (twice); and on the seventh "offence", discharge. Pasica urged workers to ignore it and to support anyone unjustly disciplined: "Remember it's your job and your future, so let's see if we can't correct the situation for the betterment of the entire membership."[22] But confidence in the legitimacy of resistance had been sapped. Management's unilateral rule-making therefore succeeded in adding mandatory suspensions and eventual discharges to the monetary loss incurred when a worker stayed home. This important reassertion of managerial control over the worker's out-of-work life was echoed inside the plant in management's continuous pressure on production standards.[23] The Pasica administration's response was to draw up a set of recommendations for inclusion by the national UAW negotiators in the 1961 UAW-Chrysler contract. They amounted to a plea for management to surrender its recently acquired hard-won right to change standards after the first three months of a model year, to change the method of operation of a job at any

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22. DMN, August 27 1960.

23. DMN, January 14 1961. Liska also reported: "Throughout 1960 working conditions have been very difficult on nearly all jobs. Workers were subjected to Time Study Figures which meant that every second of the minute was accounted for on all jobs." Liska was elected the Body Unit's Alternate Plant Committeeman to Ed Domanski in June 1960, as part of a deal with the Domanski slate whereby he would stand down as Chief Steward. Subsequently, his reports increasingly lost some of the radical edge they had when he was associated with the 'Rank and File' caucus.

time, and to impose standards without having to bargain over them:

> 1. All changes in the rates of production shall be made within 90 days of the date the model first goes into production. (The Company will still have the right to time jobs for the balance of the model year but the new figures cannot be put into effect until the next model.)
>
> 2. After a job is once timed, during the first 90 days of the model year, the method of operation cannot be changed until the next model. Too often we have agreed to higher production standards against the wishes of our membership, only to be confronted with the same problem, on the same job, some weeks later when the company takes a notion to change the method of operation...
>
> 4. No job should be timed unless the regular employees are working on the job, and a full eight hours timing must be made in order to determine fatigue, personal relief, line breakdowns, etc...
>
> 5. When a time study is completed the Company should give us the rating immediately to prevent them from altering their figures to make the study benefit them.
>
> 6. A Job Timing committee shall be set up in each plant consisting of three members from the Union and three members from the Company. This committee will be given the authority to bargain on the rates of production on any operation during the first 90 days of the model year. They will also have the final say-so on jobs timed during the year that must wait until the next model year to be changed. This would prevent the Company from pressuring individual foremen to intimidate their employees for more work or be fired.24

But the attempt to generalize the old frontier of control that had existed at Dodge Main through demands on the UAW's Chrysler Department was a confession of weakness. If Local 3 could not insist that its own management respected these workplace rules, it had no chance of getting either Chrysler or the international UAW to take them seriously.

As if in answer, Chrysler announced it was tearing up its side of the 1959 Dodge stamping plant agreement under which the workers in the press shop accepted the standard plant-wide relief

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24. Document dated February 23 1961 in Local 3 President's Collection, WRL, Box 12, Research file.

times on condition their work would not be moved elsewhere. The Conant Stamping Plant was to be run down from 3,100 to just 300 workers; 60% of the work would be transferred to the former Briggs Nine Mile Press Plant, a fifth would go to the Mack plant and the rest would go to Twinsburg, Ohio.[25] Dodge Main had already seen its share of Chrysler's total workforce fall from 25% in the first half of the 1950s to 19% in January 1960, when it employed 13,000. This permanent loss of 3,000 stamping plant jobs reduced Dodge Main's maximum employment potential to between 10,000 and 12,000 hourly-paid workers.

Recession

The onset of the 1961-62 recession ensured that the initiative remained in Dodge Main management's hands: 3,600 workers were laid off in October 1960, and another 2,000 in December.[26] A trim unit report in May 1961 pointed to the continued impotence felt on the shop floor:

> The bosses at this stage of the model, plus the coming of contract negotiations, are a defiant lot and do work in full view of the Stewards.27

By July 1961 roughly half the plant's slimmed down workforce were laid off, and most didn't get called back until the start-up of

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25. DMN February 25 1961.

26. DMN, October 8, December 3 1960.

27. DMN May 6 1961.

the 1963 models.[28] A report from the body-in-white indicated how those who were working were doing so at a rate inconceivable five years earlier:[29]

	Touch-up metal finishing		Door liners	
	1956	1961	1956	1961
Jobs per hour:	40	56	40	56
Teams:	20	7	10	4
Workers:	40	14	20	8

The 400% increase in labour productivity on these jobs was clearly affected by improved quality control and the arrival of power (air and electrical) tools on the lines. But primarily it was the result of managerial changes. The man assignment system coupled with standardized sanctions executed by greater numbers of foremen against workers whose local union tradition of resistance had been defeated achieved a totally new working environment.

The 1961 UAW-Chrysler contract reflected the fact that, like its predecessor, it was negotiated in a recessionary year. It reduced all Chrysler workers' relief time to the standard 24 minutes a day established after the 1958 Dodge Main strike,[30] and in one important area it laid the basis for a further retreat by

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28. The length of the lay-offs experienced in 1958-59 and 1961-62 caused many of the workers who had been hired into Dodge Main in the 1940s to take transfers to other Chrysler plants or leave the industry altogether. The result was that when Dodge called back its old workforce in October 1962 it needed to first hire in from the general Detroit Chrysler pool of labour and then start hiring off the street again to make up the numbers needed (8,000 in 1963, rising to 12,000 in 1965).

29. DMN, July 17 1961.

30. UAW-Chrysler Agreement, November 2 1961, Production and Maintenance, 49.

the union from any lingering attachment to its role as a vehicle for shop-floor bargaining. GM had operated a ratio of one full-time committeeman to every 400 workers since 1938; Ford had operated on the basis of one to every 550 since 1941. In 1961, for the first time, the Chrysler contract conceded that "an equitable proportional representation system" of chief stewards was needed - that is, fewer stewards - and agreed to cut their numbers in the 1964 agreement.[31] In the meantime, provisions were made to reduce the ratio of stewards to members on second and third shifts.[32] The Local 3 agreement reached the same day, was as poor. No improvement in relief times or extension of the privilege of five minutes washing-up time to any new groups of workers was permitted. Dodge management agreed to try to give 24 hours' notice of overtime working requirements but added "times do arise when it is not possible". While it agreed that overtime would be "equalized among production workers as nearly as possible", it excluded the car conditioning department (department 9190) which usually received most of the overtime

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31. UAW-Chrysler Agreement, November 2 1961, Production and Maintenance, 26. Robert Jensen, who sat on the UAW's 1961 Bargaining Committee, recalled that the union's 1961 negotiators agreed to bind the 1964 negotiators in this way so that no-one would have to go direct to the membership (or the body of active stewards) and sell a deal they knew was very unpopular. As it was the 1961 negotiators could say 'We didn't do it'; while the 1964 negotiators could say 'Our hands were tied by the 1961 negotiators'; Jensen interview. The two arguments used against reducing the steward ratio in the Dodge Main News, August 26 1961, were, in order of priority: "If a hundred stewards are eliminated it will mean 100 workers will be laid off. It will mean workers being less represented when troubles confront them. It will weaken our Union."

32. UAW-Chrysler Agreement, November 2 1961, Production and Maintenance, 25. In return Chrysler offered the UAW a fairly meaningless concession where it would guarantee workers on short-time a minimum of between 50% and 65% of their regular 40 hours' pay - meaningless, since Chrysler, GM and Ford all preferred to adjust their labour force by lay-offs and recalls rather than by the much more common practice of short-time working that was operated by British manufacturers.

anyway. The only concession it appeared to give freely was to provide overalls for fourteen groups of workers.[33] When 1,500 Dodge workers (out of the 6,500 employed at the time) turned up to vote on ratification, there was considerable debate about the failure of both national and local agreements to deal with "the Work Standard problem".[34] But the old tradition was fast becoming a dream rather than a realizable goal, and with local officers under instructions from the international to recommend acceptance, the agreements were ratified.

In May 1962, with the Dodge working membership as low as 5,000, Pasica announced the merger of the Blue and Gray Slates to fight on the slogan "End Gloom and Doom!". The slate stood for re-opening the 1961 contract and, for the first time, included two blacks among its ten candidates for local office.[35] The Blue-Gray demands were part of the legacy from the 1950s and they were basic to all auto workers:[36]

> Re-open the contract for negotiations on these key issues:
> Shorter working week with no cut in pay,
> Elimination of compulsory overtime, and
> Protection against speed-up.

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33. DMN, November 11 1961.

34. DMN, November 25 1961.

35. Blue-Gray News, April 16 1962. Joseph Gordon was the unsuccessful Blue-Gray Slate candidate for Recording Secretary, beaten by Ed Liska; Curtis Davis, the veteran black Foundry chief steward (23 years) also ran again.

36. ibid.

They were to be repeated again and again over the following 15 years, but in 1962 it was 'old-timers' who raised them - and won. After 1962, these demands would remain a constant theme of US auto workers' discontent, but the grip of the UAW machine and the new definition, imposed by the company, of what constituted 'realistic' or 'legitimate' unionism meant those who articulated and organized around them, with few exceptions, would never again be close to power.[37] Pasica's re-election, and the election on the same slate of Edith Fox as a UAW delegate to the 1962 convention, was the last defiant capture of the Local 3 machine by the legacy of shop floor dissent at Dodge Main. And it was not the revolt of any new found shop floor confidence. Rather it was a technical 'knock-out'. In the depths of the 1961-62 recession the seniority system ensured other 'old-timers' from the 1930s and 1940s still had jobs - and they were the ones most likely to take the trouble to vote. With the arrival of the 'new' workforce from 1963, the 'old-timers' would not again be in such a strong position.

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37. One exception was Jordan Sims, who was elected president of Chrysler's Eldon Avenue gear and axle plant in 1973, two years after being discharged; James A Geschwender, Class, Race, and Worker Insurgency: The league of Revolutionary Black Workers (Cambridge: University Press, 1977), 200-201.

III. Changing stewards

One of the most obvious changes from the 1950s to the 1960s on the shop floor in Chrysler plants was in the role of the steward. In the 1950s the Dodge stewards had been expected - if they wished to keep their privileged positions - to bargain seriously and to mobilize their members in the event of a failure to agree. In the 1960s, theirs was a demobilizing role. They were expected to adhere strictly to procedure and ensure their members did the same. Inevitably, while they still retained their privileges, they were largely unable to deliver results for their members. Within a few years, and especially after new labour was hired into the most exacting low seniority jobs, the members' views about their chief stewards became increasingly cynical. Several different elements contributed to this. The centralization by management of the labour relations function; the increasing value of the chief steward position to the incumbent; and the greater influence management's new 'friendly' labour strategy had on which stewards survived.

The new labour relations philosophy of the 1960s had two elements in common with that held dear by GM since at least 1947: the centralization of labour relations policy-making, and the masking of the company's anti-unionism behind a veneer of friendship. The stewards soon experienced the first element: they found foremen and superintendents would refuse to take decisions. Nothing could be settled on the spot and everything went to

"Labour Relations". At Dodge Main, five labour relations supervisors were appointed to cover different areas of the plant on the first shift, and four for the second shift. Weekly meetings enabled them to establish continuity and consistency of policy.[38] In November 1962 Edith Fox described the effect of the transition of the steward's functions from bargaining to grievance processing:

> Remember the days when a worker or a Steward could take up and resolve a grievance with the immediate foreman?
> Now we are forced to deal with individuals who are totally removed from the realities of the job... If a dispute of any significance arises, a parade of white-shirted strangers appear on the scene. This has a most unfortunate effect on the employees. They tend to become frightened and nervous.[39]

The hold taken by the "white-shirted strangers" over shop floor conditions after the industrial relations watershed of 1956-59 reduced the status of the steward and the foreman and transformed the relationship between them. In the 1950s, custom and practice agreements gave both a reason for co-operation. In the 1960s, when conditions were standardized, the foreman's discretion was sharply curtailed. Shop floor reports of 'good' foremen and 'good' stewards now became increasingly rare.

As the stewards became less effective, many workers began to see their super-seniority as more of an individual privilege than as a collective asset. In 1939 stewards had won the right to be

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38. Interview with Dick Clancy, July 29 1982.

39. DMN, November 3 1962.

called in when even one worker in their department was working. This was a struggled-for concession to help maintain collectively-imposed workplace rules through periods when management might have been able to break them. It meant stewards were the last laid off and the first back. In periods of boom, when overtime was worked, it meant they could always 'work' overtime. Already in the 1940s, their annual wages were significantly above those of the average worker in their districts. But, in the 1940s and 1950s, this privilege was accompanied by a high proportion of dismissals and an active bargaining role with long hours at the local hall after work, educating themselves, exchanging information and discussing with other stewards. So most workers believed it justified. In the 1960s this changed. The stewards' role as tribune in confrontation with management disappeared and management became more accommodating to the requirements of "union business". In just one month at the close of the 1963 model year, apart from the seven full-time local union officers, six stewards or committeemen took a total of a week or more official leave of absence on "union business", 13 were out for between one and three days and another 12 took off for periods of between one and seven hours.[40] Many more spent time in local bars during working hours, leaving a phone number inside the plant where they could

40. Leave of absence form submitted by President Pasica to Dodge Main labour relations supervision for July 1 to July 31 1963. In Dodge Local 3 Collection, Box 4, WRL.

be contacted in case of trouble. They had only to ensure that a friend had clocked them in.

Management was well aware of what was taking place, and liked it. As Liska recalled, "A steward couldn't fight management that much if management could throw him being out of the plant up at him."[41] This abuse of their position from the early 1960s was a component of the stewards' decreasing effectiveness as a bargaining institution, and further encouraged a growing rift between many stewards and their members. When it came to re-election, the incumbent would either show a burst of short-term militancy, or make enough friends in the district (50 or 75 would usually be enough) through buying beers and spending time with individuals while "walking the beat". Management might also influence the outcome by making key concessions (or withholding them) or by encouraging canvassing (or denying it) in the period just before an election.[42]

The stewards' privileges were thus transformed from being an aspect of a struggled-for achievement of an effective shop floor union into a gift of management. In the process, what it meant

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41. Liska interview.

42. Fox, Liska interviews; for a similar pattern in a Detroit GM plant, see Anderson and Jefferys, op cit, Chapter 9.

to be a steward changed. Commitment to a wider notion of class, of us against them, or workers against bosses, weakened. The result was seen in the stewards' falling attendances at local membership meetings or any kind of non-emergency meeting out of working hours for which they wouldn't be paid expenses and loss of earnings.

While it had lost its original raison d'etre, the large numbers of UAW activists who directly benefited from the survival of the steward system created a substantial vested interest in it. Just how big can be seen in the numbers of stewards at Dodge Main in 1960. Then, when Dodge Main employed an average of around 13,000 workers, there were 95 chief stewards,[43] about 30 alternate chief stewards and about 30 blue button stewards.[44] The ratio of chief stewards to workers was therefore around one to every 130 or 140 workers. During the 1961-62 recession while

43. Dodge Local 3 Collection, WRL, Box 9; letter dated September 16 1960 enlisting support in the upcoming State and National Elections for the Democrat Party from 95 named chief stewards.

44. Local 3 collection, WRL, Minutes of Stewards Meetings. Recording Secretary's Files. The three Stewards' Council meetings on November 8 1961, were attended as follows: 2nd shift: 29 chief stewards, 1 alternate chief steward, 2 blue button stewards, 2 line stewards; 1st shift: 23 chief stewards, 2 alternate stewards, 1 blue button steward; 3rd shift: 4 stewards (unspecified). Of the five stewards' meetings held in 1961 this was the largest attendance: 68; the smallest attendance was in April when 48 were reported present and 29 chief stewards were named absent. The guesstimate of 30 to 40 blue button (or line) stewards in Dodge Main in 1960-61 is based on (1) Edith Fox's recollection that she had six or seven while she was a chief steward; (2) The fact that despite the lack of encouragement, five attended the November 8 meeting; (3) Nalezty's recollection that the blue buttons still existed in certain areas in the 1960s but that they no longer wore their blue stewards' buttons. The guesstimate of the numbers of alternate stewards derives from the fact that usually only the day-shift chief steward would have an alternate; and in several areas the position was dispensed with.

the workforce was halved, super-seniority for the stewards meant their numbers only fell to between 70 and 80,[45] and the ratio of stewards to workers rose to one chief steward for every 83 to 90. By the spring of 1964, when Dodge Main employed some 12,000 hourly-paid workers, the total of chief stewards and alternates elected between March and May went back up to 129,[46] and the chief steward/worker ratio fell back to about one to every 120 or 130 workers. Taking into account a modest estimate of steward turnover of about 25% in each of the two elections, the number of workers who had full-time steward experience at some point during the four years from 1960 to 1964 could have been as high as 200. Three or four times as many were unsuccessful candidates.

The Townsend labour relations philosophy, however, didn't immediately target this immense overhead as a threat. It reflected post-war pragmatism rather than Chrysler's traditional anti-unionism. This new 'living with the UAW' strategy was compatible with such high numbers of non-workers because the stewards were carrying out a new role. Before they were representatives of discontent; in the 1960s they were allowed only to police the contract, advising workers how and whether to raise objections when the company transgressed what amounted to

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45. ibid.

46. DMN, Various issues, March to May 1964.

its own workplace rules. Table 17 compares the number of chief and alternate stewards elected in 1964 with a list of production grievances submitted at the start of the 1964 model year:

TABLE 17
DODGE MAIN STEWARDS BY DEPARTMENT AND NUMBER, 1964 AND PRODUCTION GRIEVANCES SUBMITTED IN AUGUST 1963

Department	No. of stewards	No of grievances	Department	No. of stewards
Foundry	26	3	Maintenance	18
Body shop	18	8	Tool and Die	12
Trim	16	44		
Final Assembly	12	17		
Paint	11	5	Transportation	10
Inspection	6	1		

SOURCE: Dodge Main News, Reports of unit elections, March-May 1964; production grievances, August 24 1963.

The submission of production standard grievances bore no relation to the numbers of stewards in a department.[47] Both their response to pressure and the amount of pressure exerted by departmental managements varied enormously across the plant. Management's concern to reduce their numbers was no longer based primarily on a correlation of their numbers and the volume of problems its faced. The stewards in themselves were no longer the problem. Rather Chrysler objected to paying around 90 Dodge chief stewards for not working when in comparable plants. GM and Ford workers made do

47. And the skilled workers who had proportionately the greatest numbers of stewards - including several in very small sections who did actually work - put the smallest number of grievances into the procedure; Liska interview.

with between 15 and 25 full-time committeemen.

IV. Opposition overcome

The 1963 model year was an important testing ground for the new management operating in Chrysler plants: it was the first model year to reflect Townsend's personal intervention in Chrysler's styling offices, and a year when his success meant that a sharp rise in production coincided with the presence of a traditionalist Local 3 administration. Yet plant-level management held firm to its unilateral autonomy over the labour process. As late as half-way through the model year, trim department chief steward Edith Fox reported that the time study department was still hard at work:

> The crew cuts are roaming the trim shop selecting operations that they think can be eliminated by breaking them up and dividing them among other workers.
>
> This is the foulest type of speed-up we have experienced. They've gotten all the meat and they are now moving in for the small pickings.49

Stewards had big problems in dealing with the new system, complaining, "Elemental breakdowns on disputed jobs are slow in reaching union representatives. Labour Relations personnel seem to be the deciding factor on all disputes, even superceding the Department superintendent."[50] Local president Pasica pleaded with

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48. DMN, February 12 1966: At the Ford plant ten miles away in Livonia, there were just 22 full-time plant committeemen covering the 7,000 hourly-paid workers,less than a quarter of the numbers paid by Chrysler at Dodge Main.

49. DMN, January 12 1963.

50. Local 3 collection, WRL, Recording Secretary Box 9; Stewards' Council minutes, February 26 1963.

his stewards to take up their workers' grievances through the procedure:

> In order to ask for Strike Action, grievances must be filed on work disputes. At this time we do not have any on file...
>
> Comfort for the workers on difficult jobs must be fought for and the union representatives must do their duty by writing up any jobs that are too difficult. We must build up the courage of the workers in the plant and restore their faith in the Union.51

But it was easier for Pasica, on leave of absence from Dodge, and sitting in the local hall to talk about restoring the workers' "faith in the Union" than it was for the stewards to deliver it. Figure 6 (on page 252) and Table 18 show that Chrysler's car output per manual worker rose to its all-time high in 1964:

TABLE 18
CHRYSLER'S US HOURLY EMPLOYMENT AND OUTPUT OF PASSENGER CARS PER MANUAL EMPLOYEE, 1960-1969

Year	Hourly-paid employees (000s)	Car output per worker	Year	Hourly-paid employees (000s)	Car output per worker
1960	72.1	14.13	1965	89.8	16.35
1961	47.5	13.67	1966	93.3	15.50
1962	50.0	14.33	1967	89.0	15.32
1963	61.8	16.96	1968	101.4	15.63
1964	73.1	17.00	1969	102.4	13.60

SOURCE: Company data; Wards Yearbook, Various years.

Little wonder, then, that in June 1964 Edward Domanski would defeat Pasica as president "by a substantial margin".[52] Pasica lost office because his promises of action against the speed-up

51. ibid.

52. DMN, June 13 1964.

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had proved empty.[53] Ed Domanski had first been elected from the body-in-white as treasurer on the Bartelbort "Trade Union" slate in 1949.[54] From that not very radical beginning he did not have to move far to become a supporter of the Reuther-Fraser UAW-Chrysler administration. His election marked the end of a ten-year spell of opposition (to Reuther) control of Local 3 and the start of a new era. For the next 16 years, until Dodge Main was closed in January 1980, its president and EB would be firm supporters of the international UAW leadership.

Soon after this election, the UAW targetted Chrysler in the 1964 national contract negotiations. Chrysler had climbed back up to a 16% share of US production from 10% in 1962, and the 1964 contract reflected the reality of the first contract in a decade negotiated in a non-recessionary year. It added 12 minutes a day relief time to the 24 minutes laid down in the 1958 Dodge strike settlement so restoring a little of what had been lost in the 1950s. This 'concession', and the $400 a month early retirement scheme for workers aged 60 with 30 years of service, were balanced by the UAW fulfilling its 1961 undertaking on the steward ratio. The UAW agreed to move towards a ratio of one steward to every 225 workers by not automatically replacing stewards as they

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53. Liska interview.

54. See above, Chapter 10.

retired. It also left the disarming production standards clause unchanged.[55]

A core of Dodge Main workers objected strongly to the 1964 contract. Not only did several chief stewards understand that their privileges could be jeopardized if the process of cutting away at the number of stewards continued, but many workers remembered back six years when they had between 50 and 120 minutes relief a day and felt a little insulted that 12 of those minutes were handed back as a great concession. There was also a strong awareness that the improvement in relief time would have to be paid for by increased productivity, and the failure by the negotiators to get any improvements in the agreement on production standards,[56] created the most resentment. The Dodge ratification meeting rejected both the national and the local agreements by 419 votes to 279 - and the local's 9,500 votes were therefore cast against ratification at the Chrysler Conference.

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55. DMN September 19 1964.

56. Similar concerns were expressed at the Plymouth local's ratification meeting: "Bro Gulvezan (Secretary of the Lynch Road Plant Committee) spoke against the P & M Agreement, claiming the issues will be paid for by an increase in production standards and stated that the conditions are bad. Bro Manely, International representative, spoke in favor of P & M Agreement. He pointed out that a fight by all is the only way to resolve production standards." Local 51 Collection, WRL, Box 15, File 5, Special Membership Ratification Meeting Minutes, October 4 1964. The Local 51 meeting took a secret ballot on the agreement and voted in favor by 461 to 136.

An insight into the tetchiness the UAW machine had developed during its first decade and a half of one-faction-rule was given by UAW Chrysler Director Doug Fraser's angry reaction to the Dodge Main vote:

> Unfortunately, the thousands of Dodge Main workers who were well satisfied with the agreement did not show up to vote, thus leaving the floor to those few who were opposed. This is one of the risks you take when you run a democratic union.57

Tolerating opposition had become a "risk" for "a democratic union" to take. The national contract was ratified by 52,031 to 10,003 with only one other tiny local voting to reject along with Local 3. Ed Domanski was even more bitter since the local agreement could not be voted into effect by the rest of the Chrysler locals: For him, and for hundreds of other incumbent local officers, opposition was not only anti-democratic, it was a conspiracy:

> This (rejection), I am sure, was due to the effective job done by the opposition to these agreements by distorting the facts, telling half truths and creating chaos and confusion among our members. Because they knew darn well that the Local Committee could not negotiate working conditions and standards for this plant. These demands were on the National table and only the National Negotiating Committee could negotiate these matters.58

To win the vote on the rejected Local 3 agreement, Domanski finally divided his opponents by having it voted on at separate unit meetings. The local rank and file tradition of independence from company and international had succumbed to methods characteristic of the dominant Reuther faction: manipulation replaced mobilization as the major means of exercising and maintaining the power of local union officers. In this atmosphere

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57. DMN, October 24 1964.

58. ibid.

Chrysler's labour relations looked more peaceful than at any time since the mid-1930s. It appeared as if management had at long last discovered the formula that worked so well at GM and Ford. But beneath the surface important developments were already underway that would soon undermine this short-lived stability.

CHAPTER 14

LIKE CANS OF BEANS

THE 1960s

By the mid-1960s, labour relations at Chrysler were conducted by hard-headed realists - against the backcloth of a new boom. In 1965 Townsend opened a new assembly plant at Belvidere, about 75 miles south west of Chicago, and the new Sterling stamping plant in the outskirts of Detroit.[1] Production hit a four year peak close to an annual output of 1.5 million cars while strike frequency[2] hit an historic low for a boom year. To achieve this output, Chrysler had to recruit a new black and young labour force that became a threat to its institutional stability. Table 19 contrasts the unauthorized strike loss ratio indices of Chrysler and GM after 1955:[3]

1. Moritz and Seaman, op cit, 71.

2. See Figure 1, Chapter 2 above.

3. These are less reliable indicators of the actual level of conflict than the strike frequency ratio since they measure both the conduct of a strike (determination by the workers and/or intransigence by the management) and the frequency with which strikes occur. A high loss ratio can therefore mean either a large number of stoppages of short duration or a few very lengthy strikes.

TABLE 19

CHRYSLER AND GENERAL MOTORS, MAN-HOURS LOST AND LOSS RATES PER HOURLY-PAID WORKER IN UNAUTHORIZED STRIKES, 1955-1979

Five yearly averages	Chrysler Unauthorized man-hrs lost	Chrysler Hours lost per worker	General Motors[a] Unauthorized man-hrs lost	General Motors[a] Hours lost per worker
1955-59	2,471,528	31.9	257,230	.67
1960-64	81,394	1.28	207,670	.65
1965-69	359,975	3.83	1,194,873	2.93
1970-74	308,813	3.03	269,929	.67
1975-79	215,179	2.19	149,508	.34

SOURCE: Company data.
NOTE: a. GM data for 1975 not available.

GM's loss ratio was fairly stable from the late 1950s into the early 1960s while Chrysler's plummeted in the early 1960s. But something changed quite dramatically in the mid-1960s to upset the placid picture of 1960-64. And GM was also markedly affected: Chrysler's wildcat loss ratio per worker more than doubled, while GM's increased nearly fivefold.[4]

What changed in the second half of the 1960s was not the industry's technology or its product; nor was there a major new shift in the frontier of job control - it remained under unilateral managerial authority. But, much like the conditions which saw the development of mass unionism in the 1930s, two key elements did change: the degree of job security and the labour

4. This rise in the level of conflict is demonstrated graphically in Figures 1 and 2, see above, pages 53 and 54.

force itself.

Section one of Chapter 14 looks at the 1960s' expansion and at the benefits it introduced for older workers. Section two considers the history of the black labour sucked in to the industry to meet the new demand, and at the growth of a new discontent. Section three traces the growing tension between new and older workers and the contribution to this made by the existing bargaining system.

I. Production boom

The industry's total car production rose consistently from 1961 to 1965 to remain at around 8.5 million for the next fifteen years, dipping once in 1970 and again in 1974-75. Table 20 contrasts two decades of growth with the high 1965-79 production plateau.

TABLE 20
FACTORY SHIPMENTS OF CARS FROM US PLANTS, 1946-1980

Five year average	Number of cars shipped (000,000)	Five year average	Number of cars shipped (000,000)
1946-49	3.7	1965-69	8.5
		1970-73	8.4
1950-54	5.6		
		1974-75	7.0
1955-59	5.9		
		1976-79	8.8
1960-64	6.9	1980	6.3

SOURCE: Ward's Automotive Yearbook, 1980, 100.

Another key difference was that before 1964 growth was associated

with violent cyclical movements, while from 1965 until 1979 total production only fell below eight million cars in three years - 1967, 1974 and 1975. This expansion had a massive impact on the average hourly paid employment of the 'Big Three':[5]

	Chrysler	Ford	GM
1960-64	60,892	114,000	336,827
1965-69	95,170	148,000	419,230

Chrysler's average hourly labour force rose by 56%, Ford's by 30%, and GM's by 24%. In Chrysler's case the increase was nearly twice its earlier employment explosion from the late 1940s to the early 1950s and reflected the increase in unit capacity from 1.2 million units in 1963 to 2.2 million by 1969, as well as Townsend's obsession with volume - described by one former top executive: "Lynn Townsend's policy was always to stack cars like cans of beans on a shelf."[6]

Benefits

The provision of a limited but fairly universal holiday pay

5. Company data.

6. Moritz and Seaman, op cit, 96-99.

system from 1950. supplemental unemployment benefit from 1955. and the 1964 pension scheme gave significant benefits to workers who staved with the company. With the 1960s boom allowing around-the-year working, economic rewards were markedly greater than for manual workers outside the auto industry.[8] The foreman's power to discharge a worker from access to these accumulating benefits became an awesome threat for the largely long-service white workers and for many black workers who had previously survived on the margins of poverty. Ed Liska's view was typical of most of Dodge Main's white, Polish and high seniority workers in the 1960s:

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7. The 1940 contract gave Chrysler workers with over three year's seniority a week's holiday pay entitlement. The 1947 contract gave all Chrysler employees six statutory days' holiday a year, and the 1950 agreement [Norman Matthews, WSU, 13] laid down the following holiday pay entitlements that survived virtually intact for the next fifteen years:

Years of Service	Hrs of holiday pay
1 - 3	40
3 - 5	60
5 - 15	80
15+	100

In 1961 the longer-seniority employees were rewarded by the establishment of a new band: 10-15 years' of service secured 100 hours' entitlement, and 15 and over secured 120 hours; UAW-Chrysler Contract, November 2 1961, 89.

8. In the only two significant production downturns between 1962 and 1973, in 1967 and 1970, the average hourly earnings of auto industry manufacturing production workers were still 15% and 3% respectively above the average for the manufacture of durable goods, and 3% above the second-placed durable goods industry, the primary metal sector. Around half of the Detroit area's labour force is employed in auto-related industries but its wage and salary levels have a spin off effect throughout the area. Between March 1967 and February 1968 Detroit's average pay levels for office clerical workers, skilled maintenance and unskilled plant workers were 16%, 14% and 22% respectively above the US average for metropolitan areas; in each case they were the highest. BLS, Handbook of Labor Statistics 1977, Bulletin 1966, Table 89, 188, 162. The household income distribution which resulted from these significantly higher pay levels in the Detroit Metropolitan Area (SMSA) was even more favourable to Detroit because more workers in each household had these higher-paying jobs: in 1970 the median household income in Detroit was 32.5% above the median household income for the whole United States, and 44% of greater Detroit's household incomes were in the $10,000-$20,000 a year bracket compared to only 33% of households throughout the US; City of Detroit, Planning Department, Data Coordination Division, January 1982, Report No. 423.

When we started, we had nothing. But once you start touching the money, you change. I changed. We all got fat. At one time you'd fight on the principle and everything else. Now? You'd just look at your paycheck.9

This layer of workers remained in the leadership of Dodge Local 3 throughout the 'good years'. Although some were sympathetic to the line workers' grievances about the speed-up, most of the older workers were partly cushioned in seniority jobs away from the conveyors. Some, too, were involved in the March 1965 "breakthrough in partnership" when the company and the international jointly sponsored training sessions for union and management personnel on the new pension plans[10] and on pre-retirement counselling. They objected in November 1965 to management wanting to cut the 67 chief stewards at Dodge Main to the 53 specified by the national contract ratio - primarily because the privileges of 14 individuals were at stake.[11] Above all, this layer of workers was cautious, unwilling to risk their jobs and the material aspects they provided in struggles they no

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9. Liska interview.

10. DMN, March 23 1965.

11. DMN, December 4 1965; the existing ratio was 1 : 180, with some as high as 1 :419 and others as low as 1 : 6 [DMN, January 29 1966], and the company wished to reapportion the stewards' districts to move rapidly to the contract level of 1 : 225. In practice, since it soon had the problems of the 'new' workforce to concern itself with, Chrysler management never found it worthwhile to pursue a direct assault on the steward ratio, leaving equalization at the 225 level to the slow process of natural wastage as districts were amended out of existence through engineering changes. Robert Jensen estimated that the ratio of 1 : 225 was finally attained as late as 1980-81 as a direct result of the lay-offs caused by the 1979-83 recession. It was perhaps for this reason that Chrysler introduced in the 1982 contract negotiations a proposal to bring Chrysler's workplace representative ratio in line with GM and Ford; but symptomatic of the low significance this demand had for Chrysler after its success in removing their shop floor bargaining role, Chrysler soon dropped it.

longer had any confidence they could win.

II. New labour, old wounds

In 1963 growing order books and the retirement of older workers forced the companies to hire fresh labour. At Dodge Main these were the first new starts since 1957. The 'new' workers were predominantly in their 20s and, in Detroit, overwhelmingly black. They responded differently to the industry's discipline since the tight labour market gave them the confidence that even if they were discharged they could always get another job elsewhere, and because blacks in America were in the process of a major political transformation.

The relationship between the 'new' and 'old' labour force was not helped by the history of connivance by white workers in anti-black discrimination by management. In the 1930s Chrysler had employed about 2,000 blacks, predominantly in the Dodge Main

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12. This is a very generalized description of the motivations of several thousand workers whose seniority in the 1960s dated from 1930-41 and who were, especially after the pension conditions were improved in 1964 allowing workers with 30 years' service early retirement, becoming in increasing numbers eligible for retirement. It is based primarily upon the Liska interview, but is supported by the Fox and Nalezty interviews and by the issues covered in the Dodge Main News of the period. There were exceptions, of course. Edith Fox, for example, with seniority from 1948, although admitting "I was very very cautious", was committed by her socialist politics to risking her own job on several occasions by openly siding with workers' protests against intolerable conditions, as in the 1967 three day wildcat that took place in a 'no contract' period, when she walked out with the rest of the Trim Department despite being warned by here foreman: "Don't go, Edie, you'll get fired." Fox interview.

foundry or as janitors.[13] When Chrysler recruited labour for its Tank Arsenal it ignored black production workers with seniority and by late 1941 only 170 of the 5,000 workers at the new plant were black, all of them were janitors.[14] Serious labour shortages and the federal government's Fair Employment Practices Committee established in response to the all-black March on Washington Movement in July 1941 eventually caused the auto manufacturers to recruit blacks as production workers.[15] At first, there was quite widespread white opposition. In February and June 1942 wildcat strikes occurred at Chrysler's Highland Park and Dodge Truck plants against the transfer of blacks to production work. They ended only when the international threatened the strikers to return or lose their jobs.[16] Under joint UAW-government pressure, the proportion of blacks in Chrysler's Detroit workforce rose from 2.5% in 1942 to 15% by the spring of 1945.[17] After the war, the UAW's seniority agreements and Chrysler's concentration in the Detroit area meant, despite the efforts of a minority of "red-necks",[18] the proportion of blacks in the Chrysler plants

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13. See above, Chapter 7; Geschwender, op cit, 20.

14. Geschwender, op cit, 34.

15. Foner, op cit, 240-241.

16. ibid, 35.

17. Meier and Rudwick, op cit, 213.

18. Liska interview.

remained higher than at Ford and GM.[19] In 1949 the white Chrysler Kercheval workers objected for several months to the up-grading of four blacks to assembly line work,[20] but this was the last major collective display of racism by white production workers.

The absolute growth of available semi-skilled jobs in the industry from 1946 to 1955 meant that both blacks and women (who were first hired on final assembly jobs from 1949 in Dodge Main) were no longer seen as direct competitors for work in the way they had been in the 1930s. In the boom year of 1957, black employment at four Detroit Chrysler plants rose as high as 20.3%.[21] But while the proportion of blacks among auto industry workers as a whole rose from 3.7% in 1940, to 7.8% in 1950 and 9.1% in 1960,[22] they were still restricted to semi- and un-skilled work. The stronger job-protection sentiment among the skilled workers and the disenchantment of many of them with the UAW led to demands for an all-white skilled union.[23] This went unchallenged by the auto manufacturers, who hired no more than one per cent black employees out of the combined white-collar

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19. Geschwender, op cit, 40.

20. Howe and Widick, op cit, 228.

21. Geschwender, op cit, 40.

22. ibid, 41.

23. Anderson and Jefferys, op cit, Chapter 9.

occupations.[24] To add insult to this clear - and unchallenged - racism, in the 1950s many bars in the virtually all-white mini-city of Hamtramck, in which the Dodge Main plant was situated, refused to serve the blacks who came to work there,[25] and in the 1960s certain bars still refused to employ blacks.[26]

New discontent

By 1970 blacks made up 13.4% of the slightly more than one million workers in the motor vehicle and motor vehicle equipment industry.[27] Four out of every five black males were in the front-line of the production process, the three lowest blue-collar occupational categories.[28] In Detroit, which employed nine out of

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24. Geschwender, op cit, 41.

25. Liska interview.

26. See below, Chapter 15.

27. Geschwender, op cit, 42.

28. Ibid, 43: This compared with half the white male workforce being employed in the same categories; nationally black males made up 19.4% of all male operatives, 22.5% of all male labourers, and 25.9% of all males service workers.

every 20 blacks in the industry,[29] the new black politics had a dramatic effect on the shop floor.

The impact of the new recruitment into Dodge Main was reflected in the election of a black production worker, Charlie Brooks, as Local 3 vice president, in 1966.[30] The pattern of grievances dealt with by the local also began to change. Table 21 analyses the 753 grievance items discussed between the Local 3 officers and the Dodge Main labour relations department in 1966:

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29. ibid, 24.

30. DMN April 16 1966; Ed Domanski was re-elected president.

TABLE 21

DODGE MAIN, GRIEVANCES DISCUSSED AT LOCAL OFFICER LEVEL, 1966

General	a. Number	b. %	Discipline	Number	%
Rates of production	106	14.1	**Dismissals for:**		
Overtime	66	8.8	Falsification of		
Classifications	50	6.6	employment application	53	7
Violation of agreements	42	5.6	Insubordination, walking		
Foremen working	36	4.10	off jobs, etc	37	4.9
Safety hazards	35	4.6	Excessive absenteeism	33	4.4
			Under the influence of		
Working conditions	14	1.9	intoxicants	32	4.2
Seniority, promotions	8	1.1	Fighting	22	2.9
Shift preferences	7	.9	Theft of Co. property	11	1.5
Parking lot complaints	4	.5	Misc. dismissals	34	
			Total discharges:	242	32.1
			Other discipline:		
Misc. grievances	44		Unjust penalties	78	10.4
			Harassment complaints	16	2.1
			Reinstatement delays	5	.7
	654			321	

SOURCE: Dodge Main News, June 17 1967. The discharges exclude those of probationary employees.

NOTES: a. The total number of grievances discussed was 753, but several of them were classified both in terms of the issue, eg a production standard grievance, and in terms of the outcome, eg unjust penalty or dismissal for insubordination.

b. The % is of the 753 grievances discussed, not the total number classified. Thus it is possible to say that 14.1% of grievances that reached local officer level of the grievance procedure concerned production standards and that 32.1% of grievances at this level of procedure concerned discharges.

Not surprisingly, production standard grievances were the hottest issue taken up with the union officers. But the high number of workers fired, 243, during the year - one in fifty of the total labour force - shows how young workers were less prepared to accept the harsh working conditions and discipline of Dodge Main. A retired UAW member told one observer in 1970: "The younger generation is not going to take the crap that we had to take."[31]

31. Serrin, op cit, 233.

They lied about their job histories and were more ready to tell the foreman where to get off. But the high number of discharges is also evidence that management refused to let the period of labour shortage weaken its shop floor authority.

Between 1965 and 1967 the recently-hired black workers were less prepared to tolerate either workplace racism or the severe working conditions imposed by managements desperate to raise production. In August 1965 four workers wrote to the Dodge Main News from the power house complaining that blacks were discriminated against for promotion.[32] The local's recording secretary, the former 'rank and file' caucus supporter, Ed Liska, was assigned to reply. His answer reeked of self-congratulation:

> The 12,000 workers in the Dodge Plant have various problems with management, but the most stirring scene going unmentioned is that Whites and Coloreds work together, eat together, discuss family problems, discuss sports, Union problems, Human, Personal Problems, and Political Problems with no sign of animosity displayed by either party...
>
> The UAW Union has done more for Equal Rights than any other organization in the Nation. The seniority and ability to do a job is the key in our Contract. This Agreement is all that the Civil Rights Movement is really seeking, the right for equal opportunity for a better way of life.33

It was not an acceptable view for hundreds of thousands of American blacks moving from requesting civil rights to looking

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32. DMN, August 7 1965.

33. DMN, September 25 1965.

for means to enforce them. Out of their movement was formed the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) whose aspirations and struggles helped to shape labour relations at Chrysler from 1967 to 1973.

III. Tension mounts, 1967-1973

Underneath the formal bargaining procedure of the mid-1960s an intense, powerful strain of confrontationism reappeared. The renewed acceptance by a large minority of Dodge Main workers of the legitimacy of individual resistance and collective struggle reflected a complex of interactions: the new workers with the old rank and file tradition; the greater job security with management's desperation to raise productivity and reduce labour costs; and the conflict between black working class politics and unrepresentative institutions.

New and old

The new young and black workers faced the same old problems as had previous generations of autoworkers. But by the mid-1960s their only protection from managerial excesses was an ineffective plea-bargaining process run by a distant group of older white workers. Frustration with this system took many, mostly individual, forms; but one was essentially collective, stemming from the feeling that together something could be done. It was the

response which helped create the conditions for the emergence of DRUM.

The shake-out at Chrysler during the two recessions of 1958-59 and 1961-62 had been more severe than at Ford and GM, and this gave its labour force a younger profile when the upturn came. By 1969 half of Chrysler's workers were new to the industry and more than one in three were aged under 20:[34]

	% of workers under 30	% of workers with less than 5 yrs seniority
Chrysler	36	51
Ford	33	41
GM	30	40

Two months after the launch of the 1968 models, John Bruce, the Dodge Huber Foundry plant manager, apologized to the local officers and international representatives for wrongly classifying certain workers:

> Management has many mechanical problems and it is his belief that workers deserve correct pay for work performed...The big problem now faced by management is that during the past 60 days, the plant nearly doubled its work force. It is very difficult for management to keep the new hirees in the Plant. They just keep quitting.35

But at the same meeting Local 3's financial secretary confirmed that while management's logistical control had weakened, it was not surrendering control over the labour process: "50% of the men coming to the Local Hall did not quit as Bruce stated," he

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34. Estimate in UAW Research Department Collection, WRL.

35. Minutes of Huber Foundry Special Meeting, October 23 1967; in author's possession.

replied, "they were DISCHARGED."

Management's dogged pursuance of its unilateral 'right to manage', even at the height of the new boom, provoked large numbers of complaints:

> * The Foreman has only one goal, 'Get the production out - the hell with the workers' problems.'
> * The production helper classification is being abused. Many times workers are taken off this classification to higher paid operations and then they are not paid for this work.
> * Time Study men interfering with workers. This should be done by Supervisors, NOT Time Study Men.
> * Standards are changed at foreman's whims.
> * Supervisors take off seniority workers and allowing lesser seniority men to stay on operations, saying "I can take you off anytime I please as long as I pay you," etc.
> * Doctor Skowron is not doing the job he was hired to do. A worker injured his back and had to wait one and a half hours in the medical department to be serviced and then told to go back to his job...The Union charges Dr Skowron of being too arrogant.37

Their grievances were the same as ten and twenty years earlier. But there were no longer any fixed points of self-evidently 'fair' conduct or worker-influenced workplace rules by which management was constrained to operate. So Local 3 president Domanski could only appeal to Bruce and the plant's Personnel Manager, Karl Branstner, and Labour Relations Director, Tom Lang, to stop ignoring the workers' problems. Charlie Brooks, the black Local 3 vice president, protested at the bargaining table:

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36. ibid.

37. ibid; some of the 18 abuses listed by Local 3 president Ed Domanski.

"Supervisors are ignoring the Union completely."[38]

Plea bargaining

Shop floor bargaining had ceased. The formal procedures took time, were liable to managerial obstruction, and were rarely successful.[39] So local officers and plant committeemen increasingly turned to informal deals with management. A Local 51 membership meeting in December 1966 heard how its officials justifed not writing up grievances because they got better results if they didn't:

> Questions were asked why a grievance was not written on the discharge case and what procedures the union has at its disposal to follow in such matters.
>
> The President explained that letters of protest are seldom written by the Local as this hampers the chances of getting the discharged employee back to work. The Committeemen and the bargaining Officers have been getting good results by bringing up the names (of discharged employees) at the weekly meeting with Plant Management.40

Ed Liska, who served on Local 3's EB from 1962 until 1972, believed the domination of the case-book grievance procedure effectively forced local officers to replace 'bargaining by threat' with 'pleading a case'. "If the steward don't win it at the first step," he recalled, "you're going to have a hard

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38. He felt they were ignoring the committeemen and chief stewards deliberately: "The previous Union Representation were beaten in an election because of the many unresolved problems in the plant, and it appears that management is again creating problems to pursue this harassment of Union Representation"; ibid.

39. Management deliberately excluded the chief stewards from the October 1967 Huber Foundry meeting, arguing that if they had been present "it would be too many Union Representatives in the meeting."

40. Local 51 Collection, WRL, Box 17, File 5; General membership meeting minutes, December 11 1966.

time."[41] The only way for the officers to show any results, then, was to plead for leniency and to seek 'trade-offs' with personnel and labour relations managers.[42] Management, by giving or withholding small concessions on grievances or penalties, was thus able to influence the apparent effectiveness of particular union representatives in the eyes of their members, particularly in the run-up to election periods.

Back-door pleading, however, became a highly controversial method of conducting industrial relations when the racial composition of those doing the pleading and those dispensing 'justice' came to differ substantially from those receiving the penalties. There is no agreement on the exact date Dodge Main employed a majority of black workers.[43] But by 1967, the year of the Detroit 'Rebellion', the lowest seniority jobs in Dodge Main on the main conveyor line jobs in the body shop, trim and final

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41. Liska interview.

42. Liska interview. Over one issue, Local 3's endorsement of the national agreement negotiated by Art Hughes on July 24 1969 to allow part-timers to be employed so as to make up for heavy absenteeism, Liska claimed to have used his opposition to the plan to extract concessions from both the personnel and the labour relations managers as well as to have played the two off against each other.

43. Liska maintained the shift took place in 1970, but this is almost certainly wrong, since he himself stated in the Dodge Main News in August 1968 that 56% of the chief stewards in the assembly plant were black, and the Huber foundry part of the complex had always had an even higher proportion of blacks employed there than in the assembly plant proper. In the April 1968 local officer elections blacks took four of the ten Executive Board positions, including Charlie Brooks as vice president for a second term, and Joe Gordon elected as recording secretary. It was in this election that Ed Liska defeated Domanski after a campaign in which he argued for more action on the workers' complaints; DMN, April 24, August 3 1968; Liska interview, 1982. Dating the transition later rather than earlier helps to justify his re-election as Local 3 president in 1970.

assembly were overwhelmingly black.

New problems

In the nearby Chrysler Plymouth plant on Lynch Road a similar change took place, accompanied by vocal objections from the older white workers who saw drug-taking and absenteeism from work in the same light:

> Alcoholism and dope peddling was discussed and the Local 51 position is clear in that we do not condone and will not defend the pushers...
>
> Absenteeism was talked about and the seriousness of being absent. The seven steps of the procedure were explained where in time continuous absenteeism can lead up to discharge. It is also a Local policy that when a member goes through all the seven steps, this Local cannot make an effort to get this member reinstated. This type of member is only causing undue problems for all our working members and the automobile industry will not put up with absenteeism on such a large scale. They intend to make it rough on the offenders.45

"Too much money" was the superficial explanation for high absenteeism given by one observer, writing in 1970:

> Many of the workers who stay off the jobs are younger employees who feel they can make enough money in three or four days to meet their needs. A Chrysler worker says of the young workers, "They don't resist authority, but they don't like to be driven. And this is what most auto plants are trying to do today, drive"
>
> Black workers also contribute to the absenteeism rate: one can see them on Friday afternoon, after payday, sitting on car hoods in the parking lot behind a block-long string of bars across from Chrysler Corporation's Dodge Main plant, drinking beer, whisky, and Boone's Farm Apple Wine. Often they do not return to work those Friday afternoons.46

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44. From 1967 to 1968, Chrysler began recruiting Arab workers into Dodge Main: 500 in 1968 rising to nearly 2,000 by 1973. It was almost as if Chrysler's recruitment policy was deliberately designed to balance the falling proportion of white workers in the the plant by another large but non-Detroit black racial group, particularly one that might exhibit the customary self-disciplining characteristics of a recent immigrant group. Georgakas and Surkinsuggest, "These workers were often totally confused by American conditions, and they were fearful of losing their jobs or being deported"; op cit, 37.

45. Local 51 Collection, WRL, Box 17, File 5; General Membership Meeting, minutes, December 11 1967.

46. Serrin, op cit, 233.

In December 1969 Chrysler Lynch Road chief steward Hicks had made the classic complaint about 'new' workers:

> He feels that no matter what is done for the youth of our Local, they still will not show interest in the labour movement...They just don't care to participate.47

The divisions among Detroit auto workers were considerable. They were on lines of race, ethnicity, sex, age, seniority and skill - and the older UAW local activists and the international, which had only two blacks on its 26-member IEB, showed few signs of being able to overcome them.

Drug dealing and drug use was an enormous problem in Dodge Main. It was a very large and potentially profitable market of well-paid workers, away from the prying eyes of the police. By 1968 most of the younger black and white workers smoked marijuana on the job to ease the monotony - and management didn't worry too much. Liska recalled:

> They took pills, they were shooting up their veins..and no-one knew how to stop it. Management condoned it. There were supervisors selling it, stewards selling it. But they didn't try to stop it. The fear was there. It was big business, and the pushers inside the plant had an organization outside.
>
> Management didn't fire too much on these things. If you didn't do the job, that was one thing. But if you were shooting up they didn't care about you. Everybody closed their eyes on it.48

With large sums of money changing hands, and certain workers taking drugs on credit and then finding they owed their pay check

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47. Local 51 Collection, WRL, Box 17, File 5; General Membership Meeting, minutes, December 1 1969.

48. Liska interview.

to the pusher, the atmosphere inside became more charged. Many workers began carrying weapons to work, some even took in handguns. Even so management didn't bother too much as long as production wasn't effected.

On July 15 1970, a production worker at the Chrysler Eldon Avenue gear and axle plant, who had just been suspended for refusing to participate in a speed-up, went back into the plant to find his chief steward. Clarence Thornton, his steward, had himself just returned from a suspension resulting from of a safety issue wildcat after a man was killed in the plant in May. A white leftist who was dismissed during the safety wildcat recalled:

> They left the stewards in the street for a time, and when Clarence came back, he had to sign a statement that if there was further trouble he would get permanently fired. When Johnson first approached Clarence about his grievances, Clarence told him, "I can't do much for you because I just got back myself." Clarence had been intimidated and sold out to the point where it was no longer safe for him to fight for his membership. Johnson saw his union could not function for him and decided to deal with it himself. These connections are important. The whole preceding set of events was to break down the stewards so they wouldn't defend their people. The company refused to deal with safety and other legitimate grievances.49

When Johnson saw the foreman who had disciplined him earlier that day he pulled out an M1 carbine and shot three "white shirts", two foremen and a job setter. Johnson was neither a black militant nor a union activist, and two years later a Detroit jury found him to have been temporarily insane as a result of injuries inflicted on him by Chrysler Corporation which was subsequently

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49. Quoted in Georgakas and Surkin, op cit, 117.

ordered to pay him compensation at the rate of $75 a week.[50]

By the late 1960s, the inability of the existing union organizations to articulate workers' grievances and effect any significant change in working conditions, had led many of the 'new' workers to shun them. The concept of 'collectivity', of workers' ability to influence the work situation lying in the exercise of their collective strength, was in tension with the practice of individualism. The outcome was by no means fixed in advance. One important tendency among the black workers stood out against individualism: those influenced by the black nationalist and socialist politics of the Black Power movement. Another was the group of blacks who had entered the UAW machine and who took over the Dodge local union in 1972 and ran it until the plant was closed in 1980. Dodge Main's black workers were not uniformly black nationalist, into drugs and violence or all Uncle Toms - as the various stereotypes depicted at the time. Black workers' consciousness, while reflecting the experience of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, did so in a heterogeneous and often contradictory fashion.

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50. ibid, 9-12.

CHAPTER 15

DRUM BEATS...AND IS BEATEN

1967-73

Myths have been built up about the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) and the wildcat strikes of the late 1960s and early 1970s.[1] But from the evidence of Dodge Main it is clear that the issues were similar to those which had roused protests ten, twenty and even thirty-five years before. What was new was the organizational and ideological basis. 'New' workers with 'new' ideas were collectively resisting the 'old' dictates of unilateral management job control. The situation paralleled the 1930s: an intimidatory working environment meant a large majority were ready passively to support action to improve working conditions, but only a small minority were ready to act openly. The even smaller numbers of organized socialists and communists (in the 1930s) or black revolutionaries (in the 1960s), were able to exert an influence disproportionate to their size.

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1. In their otherwise informative book on DRUM, Georgakas and Surkin, for example, suggest the May 2 1968 strike at Dodge Main which led to the founding of DRUM was "the first wildcat strike to hit that factory in 14 years". Georgakas and Surkin, op cit, 24. Four wildcat strikes had actually occurred in the previous six months alone, see below pages 423-6, let alone the hundreds that took place between 1954 and 1959. At a totally different level of generalization, Gordon, et al, op cit, 220, argue that in the late 1960s "the character of workers' protests has changed substantially".

Militants had to contend with the UAW as well as management. That also was new. The auto plants were already 100% union shops and the UAW was legitimized by management and the law. A 1930s-level of discontent among autoworkers, or of organizing by an active minority, was no longer enough to effect permanent change. Strike action was a much riskier business.[2] And so the generalized discontent of the late 1960s didn't show itself more as open conflict: the slight rise in strike frequency between 1967 and 1973 above the levels before and after, was the tip of an iceberg of conflict.[3]

Section one of Chapter 15 looks at the evidence of growing black and industrial militancy in 1967. Section two traces the origins of DRUM in a traditional autoworkers' protest, and shows how management's inept reaction gave the protest enough legitimacy to allow a small group of radicals to generalize from the grievance of 'unfair' penalties to the 'unfairness' of racialism and capitalism. Section three considers the nature of DRUM's demands, and suggests how the movement temporarily

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2. Herding op cit, 282, argues "the worker today avoids carefully (being) caught in what may be termed 'official wildcats', as management (frequently equipped with detection devices to prove participation), the International, the arbitrator, and even the local officers combine to remove any protection they owe him otherwise."

3. The relatively low level of strike action by comparison with the 1940s and 1950s does not mean, as Peter Nolan and P K Edwards verge on arguing, that those who speak of the 'labour revolt' have it all wrong; Peter Nolan and PK Edwards, "Homogenise, divide and rule: an essay on 'Segmented Work, Divided Workers'" (Coventry: IRRU, December 1982), 24-25.

affected the frontier of control. Section four considers how Chrysler responded by rebuilding joint bargaining institutions and relationships with the UAW and restoring managerial authority. Section five explains DRUM's defeat as a black administration took over Local 3.

I. 1967: rebellion and wildcat

The six-day Detroit 'Rebellion' of July 1967 took place when Dodge Main was shut down for the annual model change-over, and the EB agreed to open Local 3's hall for between 50 and 100 national guardsmen to use while guarding the plant,[5] about three miles from the scene of greatest destruction. The biggest of the series of 'ghetto uprisings' that had begun in Watts, Los Angeles, in 1964, the 'Rebellion' led to the deaths of nine whites and 34 blacks, 3,800 arrests, 2,700 looted buildings and more than $500 million in damages. A subsequent statistical analysis concluded: "While an important segment of the black community either participated in or supported the events of the insurrection, actual participation was disproportionately clustered among the more deprived segments of the black working

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4. The renewed restraints on shop floor managerial authority were, however, much too short-lived to be used as evidence for the Gordon et al weakly-supported claim that such labour unrest was "a principal source" of declining labour productivity in the 1970s; op cit, 219.

5. Liska interview.

class (ie, the segment of the black working class that had less stable employment)."[6] The significance of the 'Rebellion' for most of Dodge Main's black workers was not that they participated - though a body shop worker who was killed and an inspector who was shot in the leg undoubtedly did[7] - but that they sympathized.[8] The 'Rebellion' encouraged a political re-think in Detroit's black community which, by the Fall of 1967, was "rife with ferment".[9]

In this atmosphere UAW president Reuther chose Ford as the target company in contract negotiations, and struck it for two months in September and October 1967 to secure lay-off pay of

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6. Geschwender, op cit, 72-3.

7. DMN August 12 1967.

8. The group of black workers who had used the growing black vote in Dodge Main to become running mates with the Local 3 governing faction misread this lack of direct involvement for hostility. So while white EB members like Ed Liska argued it was "the Communists" who had most to gain, Charlie Brooks disassociated himself from "the shameful tragedy in our city during the week of July 24...[which] could not be considered in any way a part of any civil rights struggle". The undoubted opposition of many 'responsible' blacks soon mellowed when the 'Rebellion' appeared to produce results [Chrysler announced it would open special hiring offices in the ghetto]; ibid.

9. Geschwender, op cit, 83.

nearly 95% of earnings for a period of up to 52 weeks.[9] In solidarity, Chrysler and GM refused to renew their contracts with the UAW and stopped deducting the UAW's check-off payments.[10] But in one major respect it was totally unlike the 'working without a contract' period of 1958. In 1967 GM and Chrysler were still hiring workers and selling cars as quickly as they could build them.

The release from the no-strike provisions of the contract in 1967, and what Trim Department chief steward Edie Fox called "the whole spirit of the period",[11] gave the Dodge Main trim department workers the confidence to stage a three-day wildcat protest against tight work standards in November:

> They told me, "Edie: one o'clock we're walking out." And they did. They stopped and the whole trim shop shut down. Everyone was waiting and then Stanley Flint shouted, "What the hell we're waiting for? Let's go!" And everyone walked out.
>
> Workers went to the Local hall, made their own signs. For many of the young blacks it was their first strike. They made fires and manned the picket for three days. The whole plant supported them.
>
> It needed to be done. It was the feeling.[12]

Exceptionally for a chief steward, Edie Fox helped personally 'legitimize' the wildcat by walking out with her members. The

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9. Serrin, op cit, 176.

10. Local 3 Collection, WRL, Box 9; notice to all members, September 28 1967, signed by Ed Domanski and Frank Czarny: "The courageous fight being waged by our brothers and sisters who work for Ford Motor company, must not go unsupported. The members of this Local union must show our solidarity and unity by paying our dues and assessments promptly so that these brothers and sisters can be paid their strike checks in the current Ford strike."

11. Fox interview.

12. ibid.

plant honored the picket line and the strike appeared to unite the Dodge tradition of the 1950s with that of the 1960s. After three days a group of strikers who belonged to a new black caucus called "Concerned Members for a Better Union", including certain of the founders of DRUM, started to argue to go back, and the strike ended.[13] But it did so, significantly, without the firings that had become customary after strikes within the contract period. The solidarity of the November 1967 strike fired the imagination and hopes of many new workers. The interaction of two traditions had brought strike action back into the vocabulary of the Dodge Main shop floor.

II. 1968: DRUM is forged

The failure of the local and international UAW leaderships to harness the growing militancy of the younger workers created growing anger in 1968 as the company kept raising production targets. In January a woman worker protested:

> We haven't gained much on the working conditions which we have been fighting for several years. Our brothers and sisters are working harder than ever. As a matter of fact, they are working harder now than before our Union was organized.[14]

On March 2 and March 22, after body shop workers staged a second

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13. This account is based on Edith Fox, a critical observer/participant of the DRUM era at Dodge. But it is supported in a reference by Geschwender, op cit, 85, to the first black caucus meetings at Dodge Main taking place in the Fall of 1967.

14. DMN, January 27 1968.

protest stoppage on work standards, management penalized 42 of them. Worried by a possible growing trend, the Personnel Manager, Leonard Nawrocki, called in Domanski and the plant committee to warn them that if any more "illegal walkouts" took place then "severe discipline will result".[15] In return for what management took was an assurance that the UAW would put a stop to further walkouts. Nawrocki then suspended the penalties on the body shop workers.[16]

Nawrocki's "compassion",[17] as he later described it, helped to legitimize the walkouts. On April 22 management raised its production schedule and hired an extra 600 workers to cope. But, during the next four days as management staggered the line speed increase up from 49 cars an hour to 56, half of these new hires either left in disgust or were fired.[18] The result was an intense speed-up in other sections of the plant, where, as Domanski protested, "management shorted the manpower about 30 or

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15. Daily Dispute Diary [DDD], Special walkout meeting, May 3 1968. This 'diary' was maintained by the Recording Secretary, Ed Liska, who only took over as Local 3 president in July. It consists of verbatim reports of meetings of the Local EB, of the whole Plant Leadership, of the members, and with management, and discussions with pickets and telephone calls from May 2 to May 26 1968; in possession of author at time of writing, but to be deposited in Liska Collection, WRL.

16. DDD, Special EB May 15; Meeting with management, May 16.

17. DDD, May 16 1968.

18. DDD.

19. DDD, May 26 1968.

40"(sic). A rash of grievances was immediately filed:[19]

Trim Department	18
Final Assembly	11
Paint Shop	7
Car conditioning	2
	38

Workers were more aware than usual this was a major speed-up because they had already been fully manned up to work at 56 an hour in 1967.[20] and on Saturday 27 April when they finally hit the 56 cars an hour, the women who worked in the final assembly bumper assembly area staged a 14 minute protest sit-down.[21] To cope with the 14% increase in line speed the final assembly had received just 7% more labour.[22]

The 1968 wildcat

This manning level dispute about the level of effort in the final assembly soon bore all the hallmarks of a classic labour relations crisis. It festered on, with workers still under acute physical pressure, until the following Thursday when rumours spread that those who had stopped the previous Saturday would face heavy penalties. A second ingredient was now present: the 'unjust' penalty. It didn't matter that the final assembly

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20. DDD, May 6 1968.

21. DDD, May 26 1968: Plant Committeeman Charlie Walters told the Special Membership Meeting, "We must have the same man assignments as when we had 56 jobs per hour before."

22. ibid.

23. DDD, 20 May 1968.

superintendent finally added two workers temporarily to the group of women fixing fenders to the cars. The women saw this as a temporary relief that would be taken away as soon as they had made up lost production. An hour or so later the third recurrent element in such wildcats appeared: the workers' pay checks were handed out.[24] As usual, large numbers of second shift workers who had staged the sit-down the previous week left the plant at their 10 pm lunch period. When they came back at about 10.25 pm, a group of six women and two men formed a picket at the main gate and persuaded them not to go in.[25]

Here was an entirely standard wildcat situation. Management's desperation for production at any price had led it to underman the line and rely upon disciplinary procedures to keep production rolling. The physical effect on their workforce was considerable. Strikers explained:

> I work on the steering column job and when I get home I am too tired to do anything. The work is getting harder and harder and nothing is being done about it.
> I work on the merry-go-round and the work is just too hard and I am always tired.
> I work on the bumper job and I can't keep up. More work is asked and I have to use sleeping pills when I get home.[26]

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24. I have gone into detail explaining the factors that triggered the May 2 wildcat partly because it is necessary to demystify DRUM's origins by placing it within a standard labour relations conflict situation, partly because the evidence confirms just how 'normal' this particular conflict was, and partly because even Geschwender's excellent account of the strike begins, op cit, 88-9: "it is somewhat unclear exactly how the walkout developed" and goes on "For some unexplained reason their discontent reached a peak on May 2 and they decided to walk off the job."

25. DDD, Company evidence, May 3 1968.

26. DDD, May 5 1968.

But the huge turnover Chrysler experienced was viewed as secondary to output. On the Friday, at the suggestion of management, Ed Liska had gone to the Warehouse gate at 3.30 pm and talked to the pickets, four women and one man. They had told him the same:

> The girls kept saying that they are tired of the speed-ups and nothing is being done to help them. They refused to come to the Local Hall and kept on picketing.27

And they clearly believed their only remedy was direct action. Not black revolutionaries, but largely white women workers in their late 20s and early 30s and with three or four years' seniority, they believed that taking grievances through procedure was a waste of time.

Liska's diary reported the course of the three day wildcat as follows:

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27. DDD, May 3 1968.

May 2. 10.30 pm:

The plant had to be shut down because of lack of persons returning after the lunch period.

Note: Management had Labour Relations and Supervisors observing the Main gate and the picket line. They have names and evidence of this activity.

Friday May 3:

When the day shift workers reported for work before 6 am, they were faced by pickets at all entrances to the plant...The pickets were 2nd shift workers, mostly females who stayed up all night near the plant...

When the 2nd shift time neared, the same pickets appeared at the Warehouse and Main gates. The Conant gate entrance did not have any pickets. It was evident that most of the pickets were females who had a lot of seniority and worked in the final assembly department. The 2nd shift did not start, due to workers not crossing the picket lines.

Saturday May 4:

...At the Main and Warehouse gate entrances, some pickets did appear and the workers refused to cross the lines. The pickets were small in number, mostly females and they stayed only a few minute at the gates and soon departed. The damage was done and the plant did not operate although many workers did actually enter the plant.

2nd shift. No pickets appeared and many workers reported to work. All gates were free of pickets, but due to high absenteeism, who just did not report to work, the plant did not operate.

Note: Management did go to Court and got an injunction against illegal picketing and were to subpoena 20 persons if picketing was evident.28

On Sunday afternoon nine pickets turned up to a meeting with the local EB at which they "agreed not to picket and go back to work" and "the Officers promised to do everything possible to fight for them".[29] Work resumed on the Monday morning and two workers who were discharged on the spot were later recalled by telegramme while "management ...were waiting for orders from the Chrysler Corporation to mete out disciplinary actions".[30]

Management reacts

Chrysler headquarters in Highland Park took several days to make up its mind about the level of penalties it was going to

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28. DDD, May 2-4 1969.

29. DDD, EB meeting with pickets, May 5 1968.

30. DDD, May 6 1968.

impose. But the thinking that took place showed no sign of any sophistication. They felt a few workers had to be discharged to avoid allowing wildcat strikes to re-emerge as an established practice in the plant. Yet they were also concerned about the risks attached to a crude approach. On Wednesday, for example, Liska noted:

> This day was routine, nothing to report other than the Plant was full of rumors...
> The threat of a walkout in event some are discharged persists in the plant...
> Others say they should fire them all.
> The rumors and opinions are in progress, but things seem to be cool as of this day.31

But at this stage management still had little idea, and bothered still less about the extent of discontent in the plant. So Highland Park corporate headquarters developed a purely tactical approach designed to minimise the risk of more immediate industrial action while maximising penalties. They waited until Saturday night, May 11. Then the final assembly superintendent, Dodge Main's Labour Relations Director Tom Kowlasky, and a Highland Park representative, worked from 11 pm until 2 am calling workers into the office and informing them of their penalties. Five were discharged (including two day-shift workers on the Monday), nine were given 30-day penalties, four given 5-day penalties, two 3-days and four just one day each.[32]

To reduce still further the risk of wildcat action, the labour relations department then told the front-line supervision

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31. DDD, May 8 1968.

32. DDD, May 13 1968.

to mount a major disciplinary crackdown against the entire workforce. By Tuesday May 14, Liska noted:

> The most alarming facts reveal that the Dodge management is hell bent on penalizing everyone in the plant for any and all violations. Reports throughout the day are coming in that labour relations and supervisors are threatening everyone and are spying on workers who leave the plant for lunch, etc. Cameras are being used in all parts of the plant.
>
> The workers are in a fighting mood and are demanding action against the management.33

Even chief stewards were not safe. A Labour Relations man told a woman steward she had no right to go to the Employment Office when one of her members was being interviewed because "the agreement states Plant Committee and or Local Officers. The stewards are not included".[34]

Management's response intimidated workers from taking any immediate action in defence of those disciplined. But it had two unintended consequences for Local 3's circle of activists. First, the general crackdown alienated the whole membership, but particularly the EB and chief stewards who then publicly excused the wildcat and condemned the penalties. Second, it underlined Local 3's ineffectiveness. Neither pleading nor following procedure appeared to measure up to the problems. Management thus inadvertently highlighted the need for more effective organization and action at precisely the moment when black Detroit was mourning the assassination of Martin Luther King

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33. DDD May 14 1968.

34. DDD, Meeting with management, May 20 1968.

(shot one month earlier) and was searching for new ways of getting results. In this failure of institutions, the new black nationalist politics and a black network linking a core of workers at Dodge Main and some Trotskyist-influenced blacks[35] who had been putting out the monthly Inner City Voice newspaper since the 'Rebellion', took on the leadership of the protest. They were able to generalize from the specific injustice against a few to the growing resentment against racial discrimination felt by most black workers.

It is important to repeat that both black and white workers joined in the wildcats between November 1967 and May 1968, and to note that the numbers who played an active part were small relative to the 12,000 workers in the plant. But while small relative to the total workforce, they were perhaps larger than the immediate circle of local officers and stewards.[36] Only 300 were riled up enough to go to the Local Hall on Tuesday, May 14, to protest the intensification of discipline in the plant.[37] Only 135 attended the Sunday May 26 Local 3 special membership

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35. Geschwender, op cit, 88.

36. See above, Chapter 14, where the circle of current and recent stewards in the early 1960s is estimated at about 200.

37. DDD, May 14 1968.

meeting that voted to take a strike ballot,[38] and only 491 bothered to vote (388 in favor, 103 against) on June 3.[39] The political atmosphere among black Detroiters in the late 1960s, however, meant this tiny minority of activists had the space within which to generalize.

Unfair penalties

The specific ingredients that linked the May 1968 wildcat and the establishment of DRUM were the discharge of one final assembly worker, General Gordon Baker, and the feeling of most blacks in the plant that Chrysler had singled out black participants in the wildcat for punishment. Baker, 26, had worked in the final assembly at Dodge since October 1964. He formed the organizational link with the Inner City Voice and was one of the two men who joined the women's picket line on May 2

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38. DDD, May 26 1968. The ballot, as laid down in the contract, was for strike action on outstanding grievances and not directly on the penalties. This significant legalistic difference was not appreciated by many workers other than those steeped in UAW rules. The plant leadership were, of course, fully aware of the constitutional restrictions, but clearly hoped that tempers would heal and that an arrangement could eventually be worked out with management. The wider political context, however, ensured that tempers didn't heal, and management was not prepared to accommodate the Local 3 leadership to the point of reinstating General Baker. Many members therefore believed the EB was guilty of deliberate connivance in his firing. In November, DRUM wrote: "What ever happened to the seven wildcat strikers who were fired on May 11 1968? The ridiculous and corrupt UAW attempted to tell the fired strikers that their hands were tied until a strike vote was taken. Such was done. Next the Black workers were told that nothing could be done until the vote was sanctioned by the International staff of the UAW. We were never given an answer on this question. Furthermore, we were given a whole lot of oo-bla-dee about why the strikers could not be reinstated...What has happened? Last week five of the fired strikers were re-hired; a sixth was approached to come back to work, but our other brother is still in the streets. Why? Because he is Black, and these policies are made by white racists."

39. Local 3 Collection, WRL, Box 9; letter from Domanski to Fraser, June 5 1968.

and was subsequently fired.[40] Less than two weeks after he was escorted from the plant, Charlie Brooks reported to the EB "that a leaflet titled DRUM is being circulated around the Plant and it is a slanderous and mud-slinging leaflet".[41] It was written and distributed by Baker and a group of about nine Dodge workers, helped by others on the Inner City Voice.

This first DRUM bulletin focused on the discriminatory disciplinary action:

> Referring to the above discharges and disciplinary action taken against the pickets, the overall administration of punishment was overwhelmingly applied to the Black workers who were held responsible for the walk-out which was directly caused by company indifference towards working conditions.
>
> Three Black workers were fired outright. They were given 30 days off, and numerous others were given from one to five days off.
>
> Why must the Black worker continue to be utilized and exploited beyond humane reasoning and judged by double standards? It is time for Black workers to concern themselves with malicious tactics used by the White Power structure in its attempt to demoralize the integrity of the Black individual...You have but one life, live it with dignity.42

And since it was the group of Polish women around Helen Demski and others in the same Rosary Society who had initiated the

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40. DDD, various days. General Baker was a leader of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers from its inception in 1969 until its demise in 1972-73. Around 1976-1977 he used an assumed name to get hired at the Ford River Rouge, where he created a sufficiently strong base to remain hired when the company discovered his real identity and in 1982 was a plant committeeman in the Rouge Foundry.

41. Local 3 collection, WRL, Box 3; EB Minutes, May 23 1968.

42. Drum, vol 1, no. 1.

strike.[43] the sense of grievance struck a deep chord with many black workers.[44] The bulletin also moved from the immediate injustice to generalize the problem:

> Black brothers and sisters comprise 60% of the production workers at Hamtramck Assembly, yet the percentage of Black supervisors and shop stewards are too low to mention...
>
> While Chrysler is going into the ghetto for common labour, they go to the suburbs for supervision and skilled workers. The Black worker who tries for supervision is told that his attitude isn't right, which means that he thinks BLACK. The black worker who tries out for skilled trades is given a test [for] practising journeymen to pass. Where the white worker may not be given a test at all. This situation must be stopped now. We as black men and women looking for equal opportunity to employment cannot tolerate this. The time to put a stop to this is now.45

The argument that it was not an individual problem, but an issue for all blacks to be concerned with, proved the necessary link to the experience of virtually all black workers. Even Brooks, the black Local 3 vice president, was forced by the strength of support for the DRUM argument to acknowledge the charge of racism against Chrysler. In his regular Dodge Main News column the following month he agreed:

> We get a little more than our share in Vietnam...I, therefore, must once again call upon the Hamtramck Assembly Management and the Huber Foundry Management to call a halt to the underhanded discrimination practised by some of your supervision.46

DRUM explained black workers' specific grievances in terms of a general theory of racial oppression and class conflict, and legitimized individual and collective action against management.

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43. DDD, various days; Geschwender, op cit, 89; Liska interview.

44. As did the leaflet's charges of unfair, racially-influenced discharges of one black with 17 years' seniority the previous September, and another on April 27.

45. Drum, Vol 1, No. 1.

46. DMN, June 15 1968.

The crisis in Local 3 did not, however, rest with the generalization of resentment among black workers. The re-emergence of language that justified the use of strike action also affected white workers. The plant committeemen for the skilled workers in the Hamtramck Assembly plant and the Huber Foundry had been the most critical of the Domanski administration for not sticking strictly to the procedure in their efforts to calm their production worker critics.[47] This resentment about black workers being given special treatment, and about the sharp DRUM attacks on white racism, festered until July. Then, a week after DRUM had staged a massive display of strength, with a community picket on the Dodge gates being respected by around 70% of the black workforce,[48] there was a small anti-black walkout by whites. It occurred when management wished to pay a black worker the skilled pay rate for cleaning the Huber Foundry sewers. The Huber Foundry skilled trades didn't want to do the work

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47. DDD, various days. At every point they kept arguing to take the issues through the procedure and to involve the International representatives.

48. Geschwender, op cit, 93; DMN, August 3 1968: the DRUM wildcat began with a parking lot meeting after the day shift on Thursday July 11 that mobilized about 150 workers to march to the Local hall. There, they interrupted Liska's first EB meeting as president to present complaints of "Racism, Discrimination and Intimidation; Bigotry and Abuse from Supervision; Indiscriminate discharge of black workers." Local 3 Collection, Box 3; EB minutes, July 11 1968. The following morning an all-black DRUM support picket was put on the Jos Campau Main gate, and picketing was kept up on Saturday as well. The wildcat ended on Monday July 15 when Chrysler secured injunctions against unnamed DRUM pickets.

themselves, but objected to its being classified "skilled", and put up a picket in their cars at some distance from the plant. None turned up that day. Management seized upon this strike to mete out a bit of 'equality' and they fired the Huber Foundry skilled trades chief steward, Cy Van Fleteren.[49]

This disciplinary action had the opposite effect to that intended. It left the Local 3 officers with two sets of discharges which appeared similar but in fact were very different in content. On the one hand there were the May 2 strikers, against whom the company had cast-iron cases, including photographic evidence and several statements from supervisors. They could not be won through the grievance procedure; to secure the reinstatement of all seven would require a management climb-down or show of still more "compassion" - or the plant to stage a successful strike. But, as Liska and Brooks put on the record at the special Local 3 membership meeting on May 26, "according to Contractural (sic) procedures, discharge cases are not strikeable."[50] On the other hand they had a white chief steward against whom there was no evidence except his failure, along with

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49. Local 3 collection, WRL, Box 3; EB Minutes, July 25 1968; Liska interview.

50. DDD, May 26 1968. Production standard grievances were the only ones on which a legal strike could take place during the course of a contract, and that would only be legal if all the stages of procedure had been fully exhausted.

the rest of his members, to appear at work on July 18:[51] the Van Fleteren case could be fought and won within the procedure. What appeared to be two similar cases were not: and the different treatment meted out in October 1968 - Van Fleteren was reinstated[52] while two blacks, General Baker and Bennie Tate, remained discharged - confirmed for many blacks that Chrysler's 'justice' was racially motivated.[53]

DRUM's influence within Dodge Main increased and its tone became more strident. The July wildcat was considered highly successful since no-one was fired. DRUM then organized an effective boycott of two local bars which refused to hire blacks, and ran a candidate, Ron March, in a special election for the EB Trustee position. He headed the first ballot, with 521 votes but lost the run-off by 1,386 votes to Joe Elliott's 2,091.[54] The numbers supporting DRUM were evidently growing and, indeed, DRUM

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51. In September the skilled division at Huber Foundry continued their partly racist, partly skill conscious campaign by submitting 393 signatures on a petition to form a Separate Unit within Local 3 from the rest of the Huber Foundry; Local 3 Collection, WRL, EB Minutes September 12 1968.

52. Local 3 Collection, Box 3; EB minutes, October 24 1968.

53. The rule-making and rule-enforcing procedures discriminated against anyone who took direct action, but under constant pressure to ship completed cars out of the plants, Chrysler management was most concerned to prevent successful rule-breaking by those who constituted the majority of assembly workers and who had the most interest in breaking the rules, and these were blacks. The five who were given their jobs back included the two white women fired and three blacks.

54. Local 3 Collection, Box 9; Results of election of September 26 1968 in which 22 candidates stood for Trustee, and of run-off on October 3 1968.

claimed that the run-off election was stolen.[55] Its reputation also spread beyond Hamtramck and 'revolutionary union movement' groups were established at Ford's Rouge plant and at Chrysler's Eldon Avenue gear and axle plant, where 26 workers were fired in January 1969 as a result of a wildcat protest against penalties imposed on workers returning late from an ELRUM meeting.[56]

III. DRUM demands

The movement reflected the dovetailing of the wider civil rights movement with shop floor workers' demands for restraint over the exercise of managerial authority. When DRUM listed 14 demands, the first eight were straightforward demands for 'fair' treatment:

1. 50 black foremen.
2. 10 black general foremen immediately.
3. 3 black superintendents.
4. A black plant manager.
5. That the majority of the employment office personnel be black.
6. All black doctors and 50% black nurses in the medical centers at this plant.
7. That the medical policy at this plant be changed entirely.
8. 50% of all plant protection guards be black and that every time a black worker is removed from plant premises that he be led by a black brother.[57]

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55. Geschwender, op cit, 104-109. DRUM made this charge each time it was beaten in elections. Liska, of course, denied there was any illegitimate ballot activity on his part in either this election or in his even more controversial re-election as president in 1970. But he recognized that there might have been larger numbers of Hamtramck-based (ie Polish) retirees voting in these elections because of the greater interest they provoked than previously - and the issue of white retirees outvoting the majority of blacks who worked in the plant was one of DRUM's charges; Liska interview.

56. Geschwender, op cit, 94-5. Other RUM groups were set up in 1969 as was the umbrella group, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.

57. DRUM, Vol.1, No.9.

None of these demands directly challenged Chrysler's capacity to control the labour process and most, if not all, were implemented during the next five years. In 1969, a new 'integrationist' policy was consciously introduced into the plant by the new personnel manager, Dick Clancy. The recruitment of black foremen, general foremen and superintendents was accelerated, and existing supervisors were either 'educated' on the race issue or removed.[58]

The DRUM movement, however, raised two other sets of demands that did directly threaten managerial control. In language borrowed directly from the traditional Dodge left, it demanded a new grievance system, job safety, a fight against the speed up,

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58. Interview with Dick Clancy, Chrysler Labour Relations Executive, Highland Park, July 19 1982. Clancy was a former FBI employee who had joined Chrysler's personnel department in the late 1950s, serving as personnel manager at the Chrysler Kercheval plant for many years before being transferred to the 'hot seat' at Dodge Main in 1969, with a brief to 'clean up' the management's act there.

the four-day week and a doubling of production workers' wages. DRUM also raised a wider, more 'political' category of demand that clearly reflected its editors' attempt to generalize from grievances in Dodge Main to the situation of blacks in America and oppression throughout the world. DRUM's last six demands in the bulletin quoted above were:

> 9. DRUM demands that all black workers immediately stop paying union dues.
> 10. DRUM demands that the two hours' pay that goes into union dues be levied to the black community to aid in self determination for black people.
> 11. DRUM demands that the double standard be eliminated and that a committee of the black rank and file be set up to investigate all grievances against the corporation, to find out what type of discipline is to be taken against corporation, and also to find out what type of discipline is to be taken against Chrysler Corporation employees.
> 12. DRUM demands that all black workers who have been fired on trumped up racist charges be brought back with all lost pay.
> 13. DRUM demands that our fellow black brothers in South Africa working for Chrysler Corp. and its subsidiaries, be paid at an equal scale as white racist co-workers.
> 14. DRUM also demands that a black brother be appointed as head of the board of directors of Chrysler Corp.60

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59. League of Revolutionary Black workers, March on Cobo Hall, October-November 1969, leaflet for a special UAW Convention:
"* We demand that the grievance procedure be completely revised so that grievances are settled immediately on the job by the workers in the plant involved. The grievance procedure is used to prevent workers from using their strike power to fight abuses from management. Since the procedure completely ties the hands of workers and basically serves company interests it should be scrapped and replaced by a completely new system.
* Elimination of all safety and health hazards in the auto industry. this means cleaning the air in the foundry and redesigning dangerous machinery, and a cut back in production on hazardous jobs.
* The union must fight vigorously against speed up and increases in production standards. The companies should double the size of their work force to meet the present workload...With today's technology production standards can easily be cut to reasonable humane lines.
* The union must fight for a five hour work day and a four day work week. The profit level of industry is high enough to allow for more leisure time for workers.
* The union must fight for an immediate doubling of the wages of all production workers...We know how wealthy the company is. We know how low their labour costs presently are. In fact, we know that it costs less than $100 in labour to produce a $3,000 car. We say increase that labour cost to $200 per car and double the wages immediately."
This part of League's programme was virtually identical to that developed by the left-organized United National Caucus that operated within the UAW from 1969-1974. See Local 3 UNC 1970 election programme, in Local 3 Collection, WRL.

60. Drum, Vol 1, No. 9. In the October 1969 League programme quoted above, they included the demand for the withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam.

Like the demands for major changes in shop floor conditions, these directly challenged managerial power and were unattainable short of the kind of revolutionary change in society the League's wanted.

Frontier of conflict

DRUM's impact on the frontier of control is not quantifiable. There was a marked fall in car output per manual employee from 1968 to 1970, shown in Figure 6,[61] but this was primarily the result of a fall in production targets. Yet it would be surprising if the barrage of publicity given by DRUM to individual cases of foremen harassing black and women workers, and the regular resort of angry workers to physical protest, did not have some effect. The evidence confirms a new wave of primarily defensive struggles: collective protests against working in excessive heat in the summer; and against 'unjust' disciplinary penalties. Liska's diary entry for Tuesday February 25 1969 with its report of recurrent, short stoppages and threats of picketing is typical:

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61. See above, Chapter 13.

Thursday Feb 20:

Work stoppage due to a worker being penalized three days. After work stoppage management reduced the penalty and workers went back.

Friday Feb 21:

About 15 members from this same group (Fox district) did not report to work. They came to the pay office and demanded their pay checks. The checks were in the department office. The group went to the department and after creating a scene, swearing, drinking, calling other workers names for working, etc, they got their checks and left.

Monday Feb 24:

After an all day investigation by management, they, at the end of the day meted out several penalties for the Friday incident. One fellow was discharged, four were given penalties up to five days off.

Tuesday:

Three of the five workers penalized reported to work. One actually went on the line and started to work. Supervisors notified them of their penalties, etc. A work stoppage of about 12 minutes occurred before others went to work and the three men left the plant. The three men told management that Edith Fox told them to come in. She denied it.

After the first break, again a work stoppage occurred. About 12 minutes were involved and the lines started again.

During the rest of the day, Chuck Walters (Committeeman) and Edith Fox met with the management to discuss the penalties. The discharge case was reduced to five days.

After the meeting, about 3 pm, Edith Fox went along the lines in the group and told everyone to go to the local hall for a meeting.62

The issue that provoked the first short solidarity stoppage was an 'unjust' penalty. Further penalties against the group who were celebrating their initial victory and who only entered the plant to collect their pay checks caused the second. The full thrust of the workers' anger against the company was, however, clearly restrained. The lines were only stopped for brief periods and the three who defied management by coming in to work in spite of their penalties, soon went home. It was as if they knew there was a line beyond which further "illegal" acts would bring about an escalation by management. Instead, the full force of their frustration was directed against a target that was not a

62. Liska's diary, February 25 1969; in Liska's possession at time of writing. To be placed in Liska Collection, WRL.

real threat: the left-wing chief steward, black committeeman and Local 3 president. Liska's diary continued:

> About 50 persons were in the Executive Board room. Chuck Walters tried to explain what happened at the meeting. They would not listen. Edith Fox tried to explain about the problems. They shouted her down. Ed Liska tried to talk about procedures that must be followed. Deaf ears. Joe Gordon attempted to talk. He was shouted down and called names.
>
> The group was totally unreachable. Few did not know the rules. Some from the extreme militant group. Others just came along to hear and see. Swearing, dirty talk and just plain arrogance prevailed at the meeting. They say, 'send telegrams to the five people who were penalized, get them back to work and get rid of the general foreman, etc'... Simple as that.
>
> They said that they will picket the plant on Wednesday.
>
> Liska cautioned them that they will be fired and that injunctions will clear them off the gates, etc. They ignored the plea.
>
> The meeting ended up with shouts, yells, confusions. No one knew exactly what will happen, except that there is a total breakdown in that trim group.63

While car production remained at high levels, and before the longer-term changes Chrysler was planning were fully implemented, labour relations at Dodge Main remained literally on a knife's edge.[64]

In one of the more famous incidents, a DRUM activist, a spotwelder Rushie Forge, was suspended by a black labour relations supervisor without explanation and denied the right to collect his possessions. While his steward, Fowler, and the supervisor Tom Young were arguing, Forge "suddenly turned around and hit Young with his fist, then he reached inside of his shirt and pulled out a dagger, lunged at Young and struck him twice in the

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63. ibid.

64. Liska explained his problem with taking up many discharge cases: "A lot of guys didn't think hitting a foreman or stabbing him is doing anything wrong. so they say they're innocent."

back."[65] To protect themselves some foremen started to carry guns, which became so common in the plant that in 1969 management posted notices prohibiting them.[66] Workers were still being dismissed for being in possession of guns or for firing them inside the factory in 1970 and 1971.[67]

UAW response

Until 1960 workplace unrest was often viewed as an opportunity by the full-time local officers. But in the late 1960s it was a destabilizing, hostile element, even for UAW leftists like Edie Fox. To the sheltered UAW officials of Solidarity House who had marched behind Walter Reuther and Martin Luther King in a quarter of a million-strong Freedom parade down Detroit's Woodward Avenue in 1963 on the twentieth anniversary of the Detroit race riots, the movement was doubly shocking. It challenged their ostensible liberalism and disturbed their comfortable relationship with the auto companies. Once the UAW

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65. Forge escaped by running out of the plant; but after one steward had escorted Young to the hospital, "Young made a telephone call to Personnel Manager Leonard Nawrocki, demanding that steward Fowler be fired for not helping him when Forge was attacking him with the knife"; Liska's diary, February 12 1969.

66. Assembly grievance book, grievance A70-602-360, November 14 1970.

67. ibid, grievance A71-735-582, November 16 1971.

realized DRUM had survived the first highly-charged weeks after the May wildcat, it fell back on Reuther's traditional weapon against dissent, red-baiting. The July 1968 issue of the UAW's official magazine, Battleline, charged:

> Black Power advocates are claiming that "white racist foremen" are "harassing, insulting, driving and snapping the whip over the backs of thousands of black workers at the Dodge plant."
>
> Using these lies as their base for creating discontent they have formed the "Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement." (DRUM). The theory behind the movement is pure marxism (divide and conquer), and they even quote from the works of a noted communist, W E B Dubois, in their newsletter (DRUM).
>
> It appears to us that the communist-inspired black power movement has shifted from looting and burning to leading campus revolts and attempting to bring the black workers into the revolution.
>
> It was exactly this combination of events which the Reds used - almost successfully - to bring the iron curtain down on France recently. With only a handful they spearheaded the student strike while communist goons kept the French workers from returning to their jobs.
>
> We know the communists look upon Detroit's automobile plants as the economic bellwether of the country. And to bring their production to a screeching halt through internal revolution would better serve the enemy's purpose than if they were bombed out by enemy aircraft.68

In Local 3, Liska dropped his earlier sympathetic approach and headed off trouble by relying on the old tactic of denying the militants a platform at general membership meetings:

> I learned that too, being a local officer. Only the politicians who want to stick you with something showed up to regular membership meetings, so you told your guys to stay away or go to the bar next door in case we need you.69

This strategy enabled the EB to settle the 1968 wildcat grievances without having to put the settlement before the membership. It also bought time to get more blacks involved in the UAW machine locally and nationally.

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68. Cited in Geschwender, op cit, 104-5.

69. Liska interview.

The UAW's deliberate manoeuvering to make life difficult for DRUM in turn fueled the DRUM activists' hostility to the local UAW activists. In the March 1970 Local 3 elections Edie Fox ran on the opposition United National Caucus platform and was attacked by DRUM as a "liberal".[70] Liska, running again for president, was accused of having "almost dead racist old pollocks standing in line for two and three hours trying to vote for some already dead pollocks".[71] DRUM's frustration at its lack of effectiveness and the growing tension within the League of Revolutionary Black Workers between those who were essentially black nationalists and those who saw the need to work with white workers and revolutionaries, was marked by a heightened verbal rhetoric that became ever more vitriolic. It also testified to the fact that by 1970 DRUM had passed its peak.

Despite its obvious anxiety, Liska's 'United Membership' slate won all ten EB positions, and Liska, although opposed by Ron March and another black candidate, secured an overall majority and was re-elected without the need for a run-off. The ease with which this election was won clearly surprised Liska and

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70. The UNC was established at the 1968 UAW convention by a core of radical skilled workers around Pete Kelly (GM) and Art Fox (Edith Fox's husband who was a skilled worker at Ford's Rouge plant) arising out of the discontent of skilled workers at the 1967 contract which, nationally, as at Local 3, the skilled workers who were then allowed to vote separately, had rejected. The UNC attempted to mobilize production workers, but, being predominantly white - even though Jordan Sims was a co-chairman after 1970 - it made very little headway and was virtually a propaganda caucus by 1973; Anderson and Jefferys, op cit, Chapter Ten.

71. Drum, Vol.3, No.5.

DRUM. The EB's nervousness about the outcome had led it to ask Reuther to send physical assistance - which he did, in the form of a dozen armed international staff workers from the regional office.[72] DRUM complained bitterly after the election that "Liska won at the point of a gun",[73] and didn't run any more candidates in Dodge Main. But DRUM's defeat was real enough, and it reflected more than the development of internal dissension within the League and the greater preparedness of the existing Local 3 power structure for the electoral challenge.[74] The 1970 downturn in auto production hit Dodge Main's low seniority workers hard, while Chrysler's new accommodationist strategy split DRUM's black support by presenting a different approach to black inequality.

IV. New strategies

In 1969 Chrysler introduced a two-pronged strategy to deal with the challenge of its new black labour force. It decided to reduce overall reliance upon Detroit and Detroit's black working class

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72. DMN, May 16 1970, prints Reuther's reply to Liska's letter of thanks: "Dear Ed, We were pleased to be able to extend a helping hand of friendship and solidarity. The results proved there is no substitute for teamwork and solidarity when there is a problem to be settled." This characteristic statement of Reuther practice was written just two days before he was killed in an aeroplane crash flying out to the monument he had built to himself, the UAW's residential training resort at Black Lake. Liska says of the effect of "one week in Black Lake" on a black militant who was sent there from the local in the early 1970s: "It turned him round. Just one week up there"; Liska interview.

73. DRUM, Volume 3, No. 5.

74. Geschwender, op cit, 120-122.

for its labour supply. This could not be done overnight and it was ten years before Dodge Main itself was closed. The second aspect of the new strategy was to develop a new 'liberal' image. Chrysler determined to respond to the 'genuine' grievances of racial injustice while continuing to act vigorously against the revolutionaries who wished to challenge its power.

Dick Clancy, the Personnel Manager who was moved to Dodge Main in 1969 with the brief of 'integrating' the plant, claimed later: "Within a year I had DRUM beaten."[75] Certainly, significant numbers of former black union activists, and even some who had come close to DRUM, were promoted to foreman.[76] And with the room for racial conflict reduced on the job, DRUM's ability to generalize from a particular production standard grievance or particular piece of harassment on the basis of 'white against black' became increasingly limited. Chrysler also encouraged the emergence of a layer of 'responsible' black local union leaders. But this carried a price: management had to show a willingness to allow certain up and coming local activists to 'win' a few victories.

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75. Clancy interview.

76. Liska, Fox interviews; Ernie Allen, "Dying from the Inside: The Decline of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers", They should have served that cup of coffee: seven radicals remember the 60s, ed. Dick Cluster (Boston: South End, 1979), 77.

Chrysler's accommodationist approach was generally successful. By restoring some credibility to a new layer of union activists it persuaded several articulate individuals, who might otherwise have remained in opposition, to work within the local structure. Management's attitude to the 'responsible' local leadership had been generally contemptuous after the watershed of 1957-59. From 1969, as if suddenly aware that the stewards and local officers were helping to keep the lid on the kettle, management consciously built them up again as a force through which changes (albeit of a minor character) could take place. This explains why Liska's recollection, "We won almost everything we went in for",[77] appears to conflict with the evidence of harsh discipline, a high turnover and, in 1973, renewed spontaneous revolt in several of Chrysler's Detroit plants.

Clancy understood he had to win the hearts and minds of the local's activists to 'close ranks' with management, as well as to re-educate and integrate the Dodge Main supervision. He calculated that joint work by management and Local 3 activists for the United Foundation charity could bring managers and Local 3's officers together. First he held a fund-raising dinner in the

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77. Liska interview.

Dodge Main canteen; then he secured an invitation for a second dinner in the local hall. For many of Dodge's managers and supervision it was the first time they had been in the Local 3 hall. Having established contact on a broader, humanitarian issue, he encouraged it over problems inside the plant.[78] After the first dinner he wrote to Ed Liska:

> I do not want to believe that our leadership at Hamtramck is any less socially aware, or has any less will to ask our people to give of themselves to help others; yet, the record says so.
>
> Last year (1968), your local and this plant had to suffer the ignominy and embarrassment of raising the fewest dollars per employee of any plant in Chrysler Corporation for the care and cure of the blinded, the lame, the bedridden, the incurably sick, and the mentally and emotionally retarded persons who cannot help themselves.
>
> Ed, I am addressing myself to the pride of your stewards and committeemen who are the leadership of Local 3. They have been selected as leaders. Leadership has its obligations. One of the most important is to raise the sights of those they serve. It is no less true in our plant community than in our national community: people are hungry for good leadership. They will respond to good and sound leadership that will challenge them in terms of their human spirit to rise above pessimism, negativeness, fault finding. The leadership, Ed, that this country lost to the assassin's bullet in the 1960's can only be replaced by the people themselves. We can work together for peace and harmony at Hamtramck in the 1970's for a better plant community. Let this be a beginning - to show this community that we can arise above our differences in service to the common good.[79]

Within a year Clancy's 'working together' approach was rewarded in the highly successful 1970 United Foundation drive, which won support from 96% of Dodge Main's workers.[80] It was also tested in more tangible ways.

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78. Clancy interview; Liska interview. Liska maintained he never accepted the repeated invitations to discuss problems informally with Clancy, but believed that those who followed him didn't share the same scruples.

79. Letter dated October 17 1969 from Dick Clancy to Ed Liska in Local 3 Collection, WRL, Box 20.

80. DMN, November 7 1970.

In September 1970 and June 1971 as production recovered from the 1970 model year downturn management was once more seeking to raise output from Dodge Main. The first test of the new strategy came when a group of second shift workers stormed out of the plant at midnight. As other workers continued to work, a few of the strikers got drunk and attacked some cars in the Joseph Campau parking lot. When exaggerated accounts of the damage were reported inside the plant, those still working stormed out and attacked the group in the parking lot who had intended to stay through the night and picket the day shift. After quite a battle the pickets were dispersed and the strike threat disappeared.[81] The company had been able to mobilize anti-strike and anti-militant sentiment among the majority of workers as a result of the misdirected anger of a few.[82]

The following June an incident at the gate led to a walkout by the second shift in the Assembly plant and, subsequently, to the discharge of four chief stewards and eight other workers. It was the biggest potential explosion Dodge Main had experienced since 1968, but the EB was able to prevent any further walkouts and to secure the reinstatement of all four. Liska pointed the lesson out to the workforce:

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81. DMN, September 26 1970.

82. Liska interview.

> The membership helped greatly by not having additional walkouts which would only result in more penalties and hamper the negotiations for the Stewards and others who were already discharged.83

The test was passed with flying colors. The new labour relations strategy had, in effect, given the old collective bargaining institutions and relationships between the local officers and management a kiss of life, while DRUM, in the process of an internal political split,[84] had lost its representative character. DRUM had taken the blame for attacking workers' cars and its supporters could no longer point to the total ineffectivness of 'going by the rules'.

Labour discipline

The extension of managerial discretion to the handling of the black question was not accompanied by a less harsh regime or loss of control of the labour process. Discipline remained a major problem for management.[85] Lateness and absenteeism were considered serious offences by managers who were held personally

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83. DMN July 24 1971.

84. Georgakas and Surkin, op cit, 161-3.

85. Reuther effectively justified the use of sanctions by the companies, arguing [cited in Serrin, op cit, 131, "There is a new breed of worker in the plant who is less willing to accept corporate decisions that pre-empt his own decisions. There is a different kind of worker than we had 25 or 30 years ago." This view of the previous generation of auto workers totally accepting managerial authority is, of course, ludicrous - and most observers who actually worked in the plants during the 1940s and 1950s contrast working conditions in the early days favourably with those of the 1960s and 1970s.

responsible for lost production. One man who had worked at Dodge Main for nearly five years was suspended for five days in 1971 after coming to work late because he had been picked up for questioning - and then released without charge - by the police.[86] He had telephoned the foreman explaining the situation, but it hadn't helped. Informing the foreman in advance wasn't good enough either for a trim department worker who told her foreman she would be late because she had to take her baby to the doctor.[87] She "did not come at all due to baby crying all afternoon", and was also given a five day penalty lay-off. One worker with 20 years seniority was sent home by the company doctor because a boil on his stomach had burst. But when he returned to work two days later he was suspended because he "did not bring in any substantiation"[88] for his absence. In another grievance, a worker complained that when his wife telephoned the plant to ask him to take her to hospital at 6 pm, his foreman had refused to release him. When he finally did agree to let him go, at 11 pm, the worker returned home to find his wife had had a miscarriage.[89] Leaving without permission for any reason was

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86. Ed Liska, Assembly grievance book, 1970-1972, [AGB] of monthly meetings with labour relations. In possession of author, to be deposited in Liska Collection, WRL. Grievance A71-835-695. December 13 1971.

87. ibid, Grievance A71-445-363, November 16 1971.

88. ibid, A71-348-307, October 27 1971.

89. ibid, A71-315-248, September 2 1971.

bound to lead to the severest of penalties - occasionally a 30-day suspension and usually a discharge.

Workers were also forced to accept work standards and, after the major quality complaints received in 1969, to do their job without any of the customary short cuts. One supervisor, for example, suspended a worker with a complaint about his job for five days for "insubordination" when the worker said, "I won't go to work until I see my steward".[90] Disciplinary action for poor work was very common: typical cases were ones where a man was suspended for a day for "failing to follow instructions" by pulling the dip stick on every car to check that the transmission was filled,[91] or where a man with a "long bad record" was finally discharged for not spraying glue on the roof of a car about to be fitted with a vynl top.[92] Less common was the case of the worker in department 3200 given a five-day penalty for faulty work on a car weeks after it left the plant. Liska noted:

> Car in California found without oil in axle. Management gave McLaughlin, seniority 1964, five day penalty for failing to check axle.
>
> How in the hell can they track the car several weeks later and 2,000 miles away as checked by this man?[93]

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90. ibid, Grievance A71-693-779, February 3 1972.

91. ibid, A70-1417-996, June 1971.

92. ibid, A70-1374-899, June 1971.

93. ibid, Grievance A71-263-210, November 14 1971.

As with most grievances discussed between the local UAW officers, plant committee and the labour relations managers, this penalty was passed on to the "next step". Even if the penalized axle oil worker ever won the grievance and got paid the five days' money he had lost, the penalty reflected the extent of managerial authority. In the next boom quality would again take second place to getting the cars out.[94] But job insecurity on the job remained, whether management wanted quality or production.

V. Broken DRUM

By the May 1972 Dodge Main elections DRUM was totally marginalized. All it could do was to advise workers to vote for the more militant of the non-DRUM black candidates.[95] DRUM's active support, perhaps 200-300 at its peak in October 1968, was down to 100 at most before the 1970 election defeat and then

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94. Moritz and Seaman, op cit, 104, cite Dan Popa, a former head controller at Dodge Main: "We shipped cars at the end of a quarter we never should have. In the last hour of overtime work on an end-of-quarter shift, we'd ship out hundreds of dogs."

95. The explanation below of why DRUM stopped running its own slate, in terms of its isolation and decline, contrasts with Geschwender's, whose book implies a stronger organizational base for the League of Revolutionary Workers inside the plants than was actually achieved. Geschwender admits: "there is also some evidence that the revolutionary union movements in the plants were becoming weaker" with reference to events in 1969, but nowhere does he seriously estimate its real influence in 1968-69, or what impact the managerial and UAW counter-strategies had between 1969 and 1972; For Geschwender, DRUM's 1972 decision not to run was a problem for which he has to suck sophisticated possible explanations out of thin air. He argues, "It is not entirely clear why this policy shift was made", and then suggests two possible reasons: "It may be the case that the League cadre did not wish to risk the possible negative consequences of further election defeats. It is also possible that they were concerned with the seductive nature of reformist activity"; op cit, 122.

declined considerably.[96] Even 20-30 committed workers could have constituted a viable UAW local caucus, as the smaller UNC group around Fox did.[97] But DRUM did not have a consistent strategy of using the organizational framework of the local to advance policies or individuals. Primarily a political organization, its strength depended on the extent to which its generalizations of grievances struck home. As Dodge workers lost this strength in the early 1970s, so the diminishing cadre's activity was reduced to mere propaganda.

The 1972 elections saw Andy Hardy defeat Liska by a few hundred votes. Liska's vice-president from 1970 to 1972 thus became Dodge Main's first black president and another black worker, 'Big John' Smith, became vice-president. Blacks took six of the ten Local 3 EB positions.[98] Hardy, whom DRUM had categorized in its 1968 "Tom Chart" as an "out of sight" plant level "Uncle Tom",[99] brought 'Black Power' to Dodge Main in a completely different manner from that envisaged four years earlier by those who triggered the movement inside the plant. It was, of course, an entirely different kind of 'Black Power'.

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96. Allen estimates the League's 1970 Detroit-wide membership as about 60; op cit, 88.

97. She was elected Trim Department Committeewoman in 1970, 1972 and 1974, and got through to the run-off elections for Recording Secretary in 1970 and Vice President in 1972, attracting over 1000 votes on both occasions.

98. DMN, June 10 1972.

99. DRUM, Volume 1, Number 22.

The new black Local 3 officers had been groomed by the international under heavy fire from the black nationalists. Their experience dated only from the mid-1960s and so the tradition they acquired was a blend of the official Reutherite history of the UAW, complemented by detailed knowledge of the UAW-Chrysler contract and an instinct for the factional politics of the place-seekers active in Local 3. When the opposition claimed continuity with the early militant struggles of the UAW, Joe Gordon, Local 3's first black recording secretary, replied, illustrating the distance the new officers had travelled from the tradition of 15 years' earlier:

> You may not know it, but this Union had a communist beginning. It was not intended to be a unifying focus for the working classes, but a disruptive force designed to bring about a class struggle between labour and management. The end results would enable them to make inroads into key industries, disrupt the economic stability of this nation and destroy capitalism.
>
> The scheme backfired. Its grip was broken by men and women armed with the unity, strategy and commitment that spelled better things for working people. The Union has been a God-send to the workers and especially the Black Workers.100

With this view of their own history, and embittered by the years of abuse from DRUM, the new administration showed fewer doubts about breaking picket lines or surrendering plant autonomy to the international than had Liska.[101] Hardy and a group of Local 3 officers and stewards were quite ready to respond in August 1973 to UAW Chrysler vice president Doug Fraser's call for assistance

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100. DMN, December 7 1968.

101. Liska interview. He had refused to condemn a major wildcat at the Chrysler Sterling Heights stamping plant in 1969.

to help defeat a wildcat at the Mack Avenue plant. Hardy boasted:

> The days of early unionism were remarked by many of us who manned those gates on Thursday and Friday August 16 and 17 1973 in a show of strength on behalf of the UAW...
>
> We urge that you also refuse to accept smart literature from those outside agitators who are trying to overthrow not only your UNION, but the US Government as well.102

The Hardy-Smith administration in Dodge Main was totally loyal to Solidarity House and on very friendly terms with Clancy, the personnel manager.[103]

Underlining their closer relationships with the international and the company, the majority black EB rounded on the trim department in April 1973 when 11 workers were discharged for trying to mount a lunchtime picket after a worker got a five-day penalty:

> Some say the President made them lose their jobs. THIS IS UNTRUE. I was at the Plant the day before the 11 people got discharged... and the President asked them to 'Go back to work and nothing would happen'. But the next day, after they refused to listen and were discharged, they found out that they did have a family at home and no jobs.104

Despite the renewed production boom, shop floor bargaining by industrial action at Dodge Main received neither informal legitimacy from sympathetic local officers, nor political legitimacy as a response to new acts of managerial racism. DRUM

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102. DMN, August 25 1973.

103. Clancy interview.

104. DMN, April 21, May 19 1973. The contrast with the local officers' first reactions to the May 1968 wildcat could not be more marked. Five years' earlier President-elect Liska's Dodge Main New column had begun: "Writing this article is very difficult and with great reluctance because as one of the Local Officers, it is my duty and oath of office to tell the members that illegal activities can and do end up with severe penalties..." ibid, May 25 1968.

had been beaten. This was clearly demonstrated in the contrast between the passivity at Dodge Main later that year, and the wildcat strikes at other Chrysler Detroit plants.

The 1973 contract negotiation period saw three wildcats in Chrysler plants. They were stimulated by the highest-ever employment total reached by Chrysler,[105] the intensity of the drive for production and a summer heat wave.[106] Yet Dodge Main was relatively quiet, only stopping half a shift earlier than the national strike call issued when the contract expired in September.[107] While shop floor grievances remained[108] white workers failed to radicalize politically in the same measure as had blacks, and DRUM could neither establish an alternative institutional framework nor take over the UAW and so win the recognition from management it required for direct bargaining. And management and the UAW had not been inactive. They had altered the colour of the existing collective bargaining institutions, and allowed black stewards and plant committee members marginally more influence in pleading for their members.

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105. 153,421 hourly and salaried staff; company data.

106. The three strikes took place at the Jefferson Assembly plant where the seizure of a cage used for transporting car engines by two black workers protesting against harassment by a foreman was successful, leading to the foreman's removal; at the Drop Forge, where a week's strike led to 15 strikers being dismissed and at the Mack Avenue plant where the wildcat was also defeated.

107. Dick Clancy interview.

108. For example, strike procedures were set in motion over harassment of workers, speed-up and foremen working in March 1973 DMN, March 24 1973.

The system had taken on a new credibility.[109] In these circumstances the shift in plant consciousness triggered by a sense of racial injustice was turned around. Aware of the change, management took to gently tapping the stewards over the fingers if their closer relationship with management caused them to provoke unnecessary friction with their members. Thus the Dodge Labour Relations Manager complained in June 1972 about "the recent work stoppages where employees refused to work because of lack of proper union representation (namely, unannounced stewards and alternate stewards' absences)",[110] and warned the local officers not to let things go too far.

This same balance of forces survived until 1980 when Dodge Main was closed. Neither an 'outside' politics nor the presence of an on-going internal tradition provided the ideological justification for independent shop floor struggle against management. 'Good labour relations' in the plant were seldom interrupted by wildcats.[111] Chrysler's crisis in the mid- and late 1970s cannot be blamed on the militancy of its workers: it must be squarely on the shoulders of management.

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109. The credibility of the UAW was also enhanced in the 1973 UAW-Chrysler contract which included a "voluntary overtime provision" by which workers were required to notify management on a Monday that they wished to forego all overtime that week - and if they did not, then they would be obliged to work nine hours a day for six days.

110. Local 3 Collection, WRL, Box 9; Letter from J Hagel, Labour Relations Manager to Local 3 President, Ed Liska, June 1 1972 concerning "employees being absent for alleged union business".

111. Clancy interview.

CHAPTER 16

GOOD COMMON SENSE

1974-1978

The new labour relations climate of the mid- and late 1970s was not simply the result of a new managerial strategy nor of unemployment. The emasculation, defeat or disappearance of the three structural factors that had previously sustained worker combativity also played a key role. Sectional collective bargaining, a significant ideological movement for more workers' "rights" within society as a whole, and a union tradition of resistance had all contributed to legitimate collective shop floor struggle. Their absence resulted in fewer restraints being imposed on the unilateral exercise of managerial authority in Chrysler than at any time since the 1930s.[1] The obvious "disciplinary effect of higher unemployment rates and the growing threat of layoffs and plant shutdowns"[2] should not be viewed as the source of declining strike activity in the second half of the 1970s. Rather, the economic crisis reinforced an already enhanced

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1. This should not be taken to mean that conditions returned to the level of the 1930s. The argument is that within the new technological and social constraints of the late 1970s auto plants, management had relatively as much unrestrained authority over the labour process in auto plants as it had possessed in the early 1930s under the different constraints that operated then.

2. Gordon et al, ibid, 220.

managerial authority.

What happened in the mid-1970s to the structural factors that had previously sustained resistance? Sectional collective bargaining, it has already been argued,[3] had been largely emasculated in the late 1950s. This examination of resistance in the mid-1970s looks at its two remaining supports, and at the impact on these of the 1974-1975 oil crisis. Section one considers the changing political climate and its implications for workplace legitimacy. Section two outlines the impact of the 1973 oil embargo on Chrysler management and its business policies affecting labour control and the labour process. Section three examines the recasting of the local union tradition into a mould that systematically demobilized shop floor resistance to managerial authority. Section four traces the contribution made by the evolution of the international UAW's bargaining strategy to the isolation of resistance in the workplace.

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3. See above, Chapter 12.

I. Politics and resistance

The momentum of the struggle for new rights in American society had been at the core of the militancy of the late 1960s. But by the early 1970s, a combination of repression and concession by federal government, corporations and the UAW had provided sufficient intimidation or progress to isolate those who argued it was not enough. In Detroit, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers[4] had split and died in 1971. The belief that rights are won through struggle gave way to the belief in achieving them through due process, whether through the election of a black, Coleman Young, as Mayor of Detroit in 1973, or through grievance procedure in the workplace. As a result it became more risky for the minority who still wished to resist unilateral managerial authority. Without the backing of the wider movement, actions that might have been ignored between 1967 and 1973 now

4. In 1972 attorney Ken Cockrel and key activist John Watson had withdrawn from the successor organization they tried to build, the Black Workers' Congress. Cockrel subsequently entered the Democratic Party and became a leading Detroit City Councilman, rumoured to be a possible successor to Mayor Coleman Young in the mid-1980s; Watson returned to Wayne State University to complete his studies; Geschwender, op cit, 204.

automatically led to repression. This, in turn, sapped what belief there was left in workers' rights to sectional industrial action.

In the late 1960s, though the frontier of control was not advanced, workers openly resisted management when they felt it was justified. Short-lived resistance became legitimate when a specific grievance caused deep bitterness and when workers were confident their fellow workers would acknowledge the justice of their action. Workers also felt they could win the grievance or at least ensure management hesitated before acting in a similar way in future. But after 1973 the ideological and material elements that justified resistance were qualitatively weakened. As conflict was reabsorbed by institutional procedures, the sense of outrage that triggered wildcats became limited to situations where management was seen to break its own rules - in 1977 it did so when it insisted work continue in near-freezing temperatures previously accepted as intolerable. When management broke rules that involved a positive sense of workers' rights - like seniority or foremen being stopped from working so more workers could be called back from lay-off -then grievances went into procedure without the option of industrial action even being considered. Workplace legitimacy had been redefined to exclude immediate industrial action in response to management's rejection of struggled-for restraints. The toning down of bitterness about many grievances occurred in part because it became more difficult to generalize grievances as the reliance by Chrysler stewards and local officers on contract procedures became unshakeable. The

wink of encouragement from a local officer anxious to maintain a 'militant' reputation without being fired virtually disappeared. With the imposition of the 'peace obligation' on the local union structure, shop floor initiative passed entirely into management's hands.

Resistance isolated

During the upturn in labour-management conflict between 1967 and 1973, although the possibilities of success had remained small, the consequences of defeat had been mitigated by the overall balance of forces. Dodge Main management had only felt sufficiently confident to stick with two dismissals among the May 1968 wildcat strikers. The first clear evidence that the possibilities of successful resistance were going to become still more limited came with the summer wildcats of 1973. These have frequently been interpreted as indicators of a rising momentum or potential of struggle.[5] But, while the first 13 hour act of resistance in July 1973 at the Chrysler Jefferson Avenue assembly plant - initiated by just two workers who occupied a cage containing the power switch - was successful in forcing the firing of a racist foreman, this should really be seen as a catching-up process. Open racism was no longer accepted behaviour

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5. ibid, Chp 11 entitled Insurrectionary potential remains, 190-3; implicit in Gordon et al, op cit, 219-20.

by management. This rule-enforcing measure was followed by widespread dismissals in the two August Chrysler wildcats. But the real measure of the new balance of forces was shown when the UAW mobilized 1,000 plant committeemen from locals all over the Detroit area to turn up at dawn, two mornings in succession, to help break the Mack Avenue Stamping Plant strike.[6]

The implications of the 1973 UAW mobilization were not lost on Chrysler labour relations managers. After several years in which the UAW had been constrained by the need to re-establish some credibility with its largely new and young black labour force, it was again sufficiently confident to confront members who broke management's rules. Chrysler saw this as the OK for escalation on its side. During the June 1974 Warren Truck plant wildcat strike against the firing of a chief steward and three other body shop workers for leading a "sick-in" ten days earlier, management not only secured injunctions against illegal picketing but brought a judge to the plant to order the arrests of 30 defiant pickets.[7] This new readiness to order the jailing of pickets had a major impact on the form of workers' resistance. By August 1979, the definition of management's rights was so clearly established that Chrysler sent seven Trenton, Michigan

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6. See above, Chapter 15.

7. Millard Berry et al, Wildcat, Dodge Truck, June 1974, (Detroit: 32 pp pamphlet, 1974), 2.

engine plant strikers to prison for a week when they refused to stop picketing after a strike caused by the extreme summer heat. This confirmed a steady strengthening of managerial authority, for heat walkouts had usually received lesser punishments in unwritten management recognition that working conditions could become intolerable.

The limits of worker resistance had again been redrawn. In the 1940s and 1950s it was accepted practice that a section or department could picket out the rest of the plant; by the late 1960s this had become exceptional. After 1973, however, the weapon was outlawed. Resistance, when it did show itself in collective action, increasingly became limited to the shift, department or section and didn't risk the dangers of further retaliation that occurred when workers tried to generalize the action. It took the form of in-plant indirect strike action rather than open confrontations: stoppages lasting only a few minutes,[8] "sick-ins", refusals to work overtime, and the slow execution of orders. The collective character of worker resistance dissolved into the individual forms of protest that had always existed: lateness, absenteeism, poor quality work, restriction of output and occasional moments of sabotage.

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8. Studs Terkel, Working (New York: Avon, 1975), 226-231, describes a typical twenty minutes stoppage at a Ford body plant South of Chicago in the early 1970s as seen from the man whose confrontation with a foreman led him to be sent home and from the man who reacted by stopping work.

In wider American society the political co-option of 'resistance'/'rights' movements reached a high point of institutionalization with the elections of a former black UAW 1940s opponent of Reuther, Coleman Young, as Detroit City Mayor in 1973, and of a Carter administration pledged to cut back overseas military expenditure in 1976. The price of this political shift was, however, a defeat for the world view that suggested progress came through continuing struggle. And this political defeat for the concept of struggle had considerable implications for workplace consciousness. This was partly because the political shift was accompanied by a major recession that both precipitated a new managerial crisis and effectively wiped out the layer of 'new' militants from the plants; and partly because both the local and international UAW had ceased to operate as organizations whose dynamic was provided by the need to mobilize against management.

II. Management in crisis

In the second half of the 1970s, Chrysler's profits were too low to finance its massive debt, maintain its international pretensions and continue investment in new products. The collapse of profitability was partly the result of poor management - defined here as failing to mobilize productive capacity in the right markets at the right time, and partly the result of three giant shock waves: the 1973 oil embargo that accelerated the down-sizing of American cars; the introduction of federal fuel economy and safety standards that imposed significant extra costs; and the massive penetration of the US market by Japanese cars. For the weakest major American producer, surviving largely on debt and already suffering the consequences of the virtual standstill in new investment in the 1970-71 recession, the outcome was disastrous. Chrysler's share of US production held up at 16% in 1973 and 1974 but plummeted to 10% in 1980.[9]

9. See above, Figure 5, Chapter 10.

The four month embargo on Middle East oil sales to the United State that began in October 1973 resulted in a dramatic consumer shift towards more fuel efficient cars. GM, which had the greatest share of the full-size car market, already had a long-term strategy for "down-sizing" each of its basic model lines.[10] Not to be deflected by the 1974 recession, it increased its capital investment from $2.1 billion in 1973 to $2.5 billion. At Chrysler, in contrast, where there had been no forward planning on fuel efficiency, the recession and the company's non-existent credit rating forced cuts in investment on plant, tools and equipment from $629 million in 1973 to $466 million in 1974.[11] This, of course, made it even more difficult to invest in the new products needed to meet the challenge of fuel efficiency.

The oil embargo also stimulated the federal agencies responsible for the 1970 Clean Air requirements to push ahead faster than industry wished. And by encouraging further direct federal intervention on some matters of car design, it increased the pressure on a range of federal safety requirements that had begun to be legislated in 1966. The details are not significant

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10. Moritz and Seaman, op cit, 165.

11. ibid, 124.

here[12] - what is important is that the smaller manufacturers, Chrysler and American Motors, claimed they were adversely affected by the need to raise standards of fuel efficiency and safety. The larger manufacturers could defray the costs of research and design over basic model lines that included usually four or five car types, while Chrysler had at most only two car types operating in a particular market segment. Chrysler later estimated that between 1974 and 1979 it spent $360 million as a result of federal intervention on safety and emissions, and another $240 million on other non-vehicle Occupational Safety and Health Administration and Environmental Protection Agency-imposed costs.[13] These additional costs were a convenient explanation of Chrysler's poor returns in 1974-1975 and again in 1978, and John Riccardo, president from 1975-1979, certainly earned his nick-name as the bad-tempered "Flamethrower" in opposing them:

> We now have clean air standards that more than adequately protect health and virtually eliminate the automobile from America's pollution problem, all at reasonable cost.
>
> Did we stay with common sense or get nonsense?
>
> We got nonsense, with a new emissions bill that makes so small a difference in air quality that it cannot even be measured - but which adds another $350 to the price (of a car).14

Yet for all Riccardo's accusations of "nonsense" even sources

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12. For these: ibid, Chp 7, 129-161.

13. This estimate is interesting in itself, because, unlike the situation at GM, it could not have been made until after new cost reporting methods were introduced at Chrysler under the new Iacocca management in 1979, Moritz and Seaman, op cit, 158.

14. Mid-American Outlook, Fall 1978, 4.

critical of the costs of "federal intrusion" do not argue that Chrysler would have otherwise survived.[15]

The Japanese 'invasion'

The second traumatic development was the massive inroads made by Japanese cars. Table 22 shows how imports overtook Chrysler's US car output in the 1970s:

TABLE 22
US NEW CAR REGISTRATIONS, IMPORT PENETRATION AND CHRYSLER CAR PRODUCTION, 1960-1979

Five year average	Total US new car registrations (millions)	Importeda car registrations (millions)	Imports %	Chrysler US production (millions)
1960-64	6.998	.417	6.02	.935
1965-69	9.106	.811	8.9	1.451
1970-74	9.752	1.467	15.04	1.337
1975-79	10.024	1.842	18.38	1.105

SOURCE: Ward's Automotive Yearbook, 1980, 152.
NOTE: a. All Volkswagen registrations are still counted as imports in 1979 although large numbers were then being produced at VW's New Stanton plant, purchased from Chrysler in 1977.

15. Moritz and Seaman, ibid, 160, are clearly critical of the federal government's attempts to improve safety and fuel efficiency, but assess the responsibility of this "federal intrusion" for Chrysler's overall crisis as follows: "Safety and emissions standards did not, in and of themselves, bring Chrysler to its knees. Evidence of poor management decision, lack of organizational discipline and any number of penalties inherent in the company's relative size argues against such claims. But a conspiracy of factors - unintentionally devastating in effect - clearly included federal regulatory and energy policy, the impact of which would not be felt until Detroit was hit with the full cost of fuel-economy standards."

Imports, particularly VWs, had increased steadily in the 1960s, but the cars that tipped the balance against Chrysler in the 1970s were Japanese. In 1968 and 1969, when the Japanese challenge had just begun, Volkswagens still accounted for 55% of all cars and trucks imported into the US. Toyota and Datsun's share was just 16%. But between 1975 and 1979 the share of all car and truck imports taken by the five Japanese firms Toyota, Datsun, Honda, Mazda and Subaru, rose from 48% to 66%.[16] The competition was fiercest in the growing compact and subcompact market segments where profit margins had always been lower. Perhaps the most dangerous sign was massive import substitution of Japanese for American cars in the 1974-75 recession and at the onset of the 1979 slump. Between 1974 and 1975 when Chrysler's share of the declining total of car registrations fell by 2%, the share held by imports rose by 2.5%; and when recession struck again in 1979 and Chrysler's market share fell 1%, imported cars took nearly an extra 5%.[17]

The particular problems were of cost and credibility. The

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16. Ward's Automotive Yearbook, 1980, 47.

17. ibid, 152.

availability of Japanese cars meant there was no room for Chrysler to raise prices to establish profit levels high enough to meet all its commitments and, unlike GM and Ford, it had neither massive resources nor a profitable international empire to fall back on. To stay in business, Chrysler had to accumulate still more debt.

Management shakeout

Its deepening crisis in the 1970s led to changes in top management personnel and later to both personnel and organizational changes. In 1970 Chrysler president Virgil Boyd was sacrificed after the launch of a new line of full size cars coincided with a recession and a market shift to smaller cars.[18] In his place Townsend appointed a former fellow accountant from Touche, Ross - the same Detroit firm he himself had worked for. The new president, John Riccardo, was one of Townsend's 'young Turks' who had followed Townsend to Chrysler in 1959 and then, rising one rank every year over the next eight, had joined the board in 1967 - a position that usually took thirty years to reach at GM.[19]

The losses of $52 million in 1974 and $259.5 million in 1975 that followed the next coincidence of Chrysler's launch of a

18. Stuart, op cit, 76-7.

19. Moritz and Seaman, op cit, 127.

whole line of full-size passenger cars with recession marked 56-year-old Townsend's own card. In 1975, for the first time since a six month period in 1933, no dividends were paid. Townsend retired in October having named Riccardo as his successor as chairman and Gene Cafiero as Chrysler president. Cafiero, a former industrial engineer at Briggs Body when Chrysler took it over in 1953, was known as a very sharp operator and had also been catapulted up Chrysler's top management by Townsend.[20]

Riccardo followed Townsend in keeping in very close touch with the banks on which Chrysler was now entirely dependent. By 1971, 12 of Chrysler's 23 directors were also directors or trustees of major banks or financial institutions. In the mid-1970s Riccardo made two world trips to visit prominent foreign banks and enlist their co-operation. The policy worked. As long as Chrysler kept up its interest payments and repayments of principal, its very size as America's tenth largest corporation appeared to make it a good prospect. Banks from all over the world wanted to lend it money.

By 1979 ten of Chrysler's 13 outside directors had interlocking directorships in banks and other financial

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20. Stuart, op cit, 81-83.

companies. This close connection with the world of finance was also true of General Motors, first taken under the wing of J P Morgan in the 1920s, but was historically much less true for Ford, who had always prized self-financing. By 1979, Chrysler itself was borrowing from 160 different banks and Chrysler Financial was borrowing from 282. Banks and insurance companies in 20 different countries held a total of $4.75 billion of Chrysler or Chrysler Financial debt and were quite prepared, as late as November 1978, to extend still more credit. As an assistant vice president of Barclays Bank International said, "None of the bankers seriously thought that this major corporation was going to flop on its belly." Right until the end, Riccardo did his debt-juggling job extremely well - partly, as a member of the subsequent Iacocca management team pointed out, because "there wasn't the depth of understanding in Chrysler of the depth of the problem".[21]

Where Riccardo differed from Townsend was in his readiness to cut his international losses. He had not personally built the Chrysler worldwide empire: it was easier for him to signal the retreat than it was for Townsend. By the mid-1970s

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21. Moritz and Seaman, op cit, 297-301.

Townsend's earlier international expansion on the basis of a series of minor loss-making subsidiaries was a stone around the parent company's neck. Chrysler had neither the managerial capacity nor resources capable of restoring them to profitablity. If anything, the diversion of management attention overseas was even more damaging than the diversion of financial resources. A former Chrysler treasurer commented later, "The parent was hurt more by the attention required of high-level management overseas than by investments."[22] But the estimated $200 million lost by Chrysler US in attempts to keep Chrysler UK afloat, underlined the damage done.[23]

Within days of becoming president, Riccardo flew to London to blackmail the British Government into agreeing to underwrite future losses incurred by Chrysler UK. Within a year, Riccardo was considering the sale of the whole Chrysler European operation. It had become clear that Chrysler lacked sufficient funds to provide new products for the still profitable French and Spanish companies. This sale - to Peugeot - eventually came in August 1978 after nearly two years of on-off discussions. Riccardo and Peugeot president Jean-Paul Payrare signed the deal

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22. Quoted in Moritz and Seaman, op cit, 190, who also suggest "It was not unusual for senior managers to spend two weeks out of very three months away from Detroit."

23. Stuart, op cit, 75, who points out this was "in addition to some $330 million the British Government pumped in during the mid-1970s through its subsidies after Chrysler threatened to withdraw and let the company collapse."

on British soil (where tax advantages for Peugeot would be enormous). In exchange for 25% of its world-wide capacity Chrysler got $230 million in cash to pump into its domestic product program and a 15% share of Peugeot stock worth a further $200 million.[24]

Labour under Riccardo

When Townsend appointed Riccardo and Cafiero as his successors in 1975, he defended their lack of experience, saying: "At this level of management it doesn't make a difference what your background is."[25] Riccardo held to Townsend's business strategy of "competing in all new segments of the market as they develop",[26] and maintaining instant product availability with a high volume of production feeding the sales bank. Chrysler continued to show significantly looser control over labour productivity than Ford and GM, relying on the massive swings in hourly-paid employment shown in Table 23 to alter production levels:

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24. Riccardo and Payrare flew from Paris to Heathrow especially for the signing ceremony; ibid, 185-192.

25. Townsend, quoted, ibid, 126.

26. Riccardo, quoted, ibid.

TABLE 23
HOURLY-PAID EMPLOYMENT AT CHRYSLER, FORD AND GM, 1974-1978

Year	Chrysler		Ford		General Motors	
	Hourly employment (000s)	Change over previous year (%)	Hourly employment (000s)	Change over previous year (%)	Hourly employment (000s)	Change over previous year (%)
1974	97.3	- 13.5	152	- 5.9	380	- 15
1975	75.3	- 22.6	132	- 13.2	351.8	- 7.4
1976	97.1	+ 28.9	145.4	+ 10.2	402.6	+ 14.4
1977	99.9	+ 2.9	160.2	+ 10.2	440.2	+ 9.4
1978	95.9	- 4	171.9	+ 7.3	466.4	+ 5.9

SOURCE: Company data.

As Chrysler laid off an average of one worker in five in 1975 - accomplished by means of plant shut-downs for three or four months at a time - the quality of finished cars fell. Cuts in quality control staff, and the short boom of 1976-1977, renewed its pressure to churn out volume irrespective of quality. In 1978 research on early customer complaints showed Chrysler quality some 30% worse than Ford or GM.[27]

Under increasingly desperate short-term managerial pressure for production, the numbers of unauthorized strikes climbed dramatically from the contract-year level of 48 in 1976 to 76 in the boom year 1977 when protest strikes erupted over working in

27. ibid, 233.

freezing conditions in an extreme winter and in oven-like conditions in a summer heat-wave. But while the strike frequency of 1977 reached that of 1968, the 1968 stoppages represented the emergence of significant rank and file resistance to unilateral management job regulation and to its endorsement by the UAW. In 1977, the unauthorized stoppages were largely a spontaneous response to being forced to work in exceptional weather conditions. They were strikes of anger, of reaction against management for not maintaining existing working conditions; they were not strikes to place new restraints on management. When the weather changed, the strikes withered away. Despite a tight labour market workers no longer felt they were entitled to exercise increased job control. The narrower limits of workplace legitimacy since the period from 1967 to 1973 were effectively policed by local officers who had no allegiance to the earlier tradition of dissent, resistance and mobilization.

III. Evolution of Local 3

It is often convenient, but usually wrong, to assume that unions rarely change. But neither is change always constant. For considerable periods, because of the dominance of a particular individual or clique, or because of certain structural features or pressures, the dynamic is barely observable. This was true of the UAW under Reuther from 1947 until his death in 1970. It had a "civilized relationship"[28] with the auto companies that didn't challenge managerial authority in the workplace. But it was still an organization that sought to lever the maximum price for its members in exchange for that workplace subordination, a process based on the assumption of conflict between collective labour and capital. By the early 1980s this was no longer the case: bargaining is now primarily "consultative" and "non-adversarial", and concerns the mutual problems American labour and capital face in a contracting world economy in which large parts of the United States are threatened with de-industrialization. Among the professionals who run the UAW and corporate machines, the

28. "We still have a civilized relationship" was the reply by Reuther's successor, Leonard Woodcock, in 1970 when asked whether the bitterness of calling a strike against GM might make new negotiations more difficult. Quoted in Serrin, op cit, 69.

"civilized" relationship of adversaries is being replaced by a mutually-supportive partnership. The present phase of UAW unionism emerged from cumulative changes among local officers, in UAW national and plant bargaining strategies and in UAW top personnel in the 1970s.

The new tradition

In September 1973 the Chrysler contract had only scraped through in the Local 3 ratification vote: the production workers endorsed it by 613 to 528 and the skilled tradesmen by 25 to 23 in a turnout of just 13% of the plant's 9,000 workers. Several hundred dissident workers were not convinced by the propaganda barrage in favour of the "historic" contract that more could not have been won and less conceded.[29] In January 1974, "young militant workers" were still being blamed for rejecting president Andy Hardy's proposal to hold the Local 3 and the plant committee and stewards' elections on the same day instead of separately as in the past.[30] But as the oil embargo bit into car sales and

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29. Serrin, op cit, 332-3.

30. DMN, February 9 1974. Unit elections for plant committee members, unit officer and for stewards and alternate stewards had always been better attended that the elections for Local officers as workers saw these in-plant UAW representatives as significantly less remote than the EB members based on the local hall. The proposal to get workers to vote for unit and local positions in the same ballot would save the local the costs of hiring the voting machines and manning up the local hall twice, but it would also make the election of opposition candidates as stewards or unit officers more difficult since they would have to beat the single slate put forward for both sets of elections by the local incumbents.

national auto industry unemployment quadrupled from 2.4% in 1973 to 9.3% in 1974 and 16% in 1975, these workers were laid off.[31] Chrysler's average hourly employment fell by a staggering 37,000 between 1973 and 1975. Hamtramck's 8,000 workforce was virtually cut in half with the lay-off of the whole of the second shift. In May 1974 Andy Hardy stood down to take a position with the international and Joe Davis was elected Dodge Main's youngest-ever president with 'Big John' Smith as Local 3 vice president.[32] They immediately launched a campaign to change the period of office for all plant and local positions from two to three-year terms.[33]

The Local 3 campaign to implement the rule changes introduced at the 1973 UAW Los Angeles Convention reflected the incumbents' confidence that the laid off "militants" wouldn't bother to return to Hamtramck to vote. By September 1974, those not laid off from Dodge Main were still predominantly black, but they had at least five years' seniority, having been hired between 1963 and 1968, and so were in their mid-30s rather than mid-20s. The fact that these high seniority workers had held down their jobs in Dodge Main despite the thousands of dismissals

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31. US Department of Labour, BLS, March 16 1981.

32. DMN, May 11, 25 1974.

33. DMN, July 13 1974.

between 1965 and 1973 was equally suggestive of the new consciousness Joe Davis appealed to when he urged support for the three year term of office:

> The membership of this local union should not be confused by the drive being put on in the Hamtramck Assembly Plant against the three year term. The only reason this drive is being put on is to allow those individuals who are passing the petitions to run for elective office in 1976 rather than 1977...
>
> It is only good common sense to have all elections at the same time in order to save money...
>
> It is my honest feeling that activities such as a Christmas Party for the children of our members and a family picnic each year are a must. We cannot hold these things unless we find ways and means to collect the money to pay for same. By holding three year elections, these programs can become a reality.
>
> Do not be fooled by propaganda that the 2-year term will give you better representation. Remember, a divided leadership never work together to the full extent that they can help the membership.34

The language of confrontation and mobilization had vanished from the lips of Local 3 officers. Instead of an argument Davis called on workers to vote for a kids' Christmas party and a summer picnic - and won the vote by a three to one majority.[35] Local 3's first summer picnic since the 1940s eventually took place on August 1 1976 - in time to be remembered in the 1977 elections.[36]

In August 1975 Hamtramck Assembly called back 2,000 of the lower seniority workers on the second shift to work on the 1976

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34. DMN, September 28 1974.

35. DMN, October 12 1974.

36. DMN, August 8 1976. The attendance at the picnic, 24,000, nearly half the population of Hamtramck, at a time when Hamtramck Assembly only employed around 6,000 workers - largely from outside Hamtramck - gives an idea of the impact Dodge Main still had in the locality.

models.[37] After a year's lay-off (up to 18 months for the majority of Chrysler's laid-off workers), they found the workplace atmosphere significantly different from that of 1973. Independent black politics in Detroit and in the nation had collapsed - or been pushed - into the Democratic Party. And in the plants the returning workers found that while the workplace union organization was more remote than ever, it was also much more difficult to create a new oppositional tradition.

At Dodge Main the remaining chief stewards were more firmly entrenched than ever following a joint Local 3-Chrysler labour relations redistricting exercise held at the all-time employment low of February 1975.[38] The number of chief stewards had remained at around 90 for as long as the plant had 12,000 workers. It had fallen naturally to about 60 when employment was cut back to 8,000 in 1970 and 1971 and stayed there when employment rose to 12,000 again in 1973. But when 75% of the plant's workers were laid off during the 1975 model year, the numbers of chief stewards were finally redistricted to about 35.[39] This coincided

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37. DMN, August 16 1975.

38. DMN, February 15 1975.

39. Clancy interview. This was the 1964 contract level of one chief steward to every 225 workers for a plant employing 8,000. Robert Jensen suggested that throughout the whole of Chrysler the 1964 ratio was only finally achieved in the 1979 recession. Dodge Main was therefore 'ahead' of other Chrysler plants in accepting the reduced numbers of chief stewards as early as 1975.

with the extension of the surviving chief stewards' terms of office from two to three years. So several stewards' constituencies were changed and those angered by this were simultaneously deprived of an additional twelve months in which to do anything about it.

The mobilization of shop floor resistance faced a still more intractable obstacle. The 1974-1975 recession marked an end to the exceptional period of auto industry boom that had taken off in the early 1960s. It brought economic insecurity back into the lives of American autoworkers. National unemployment in the auto industry had averaged 4% between 1967 and 1973; in 1974 it more than doubled to 9.3% and in 1975 it was 16%, four times the level of the 'good times'. It reached a monthly high of 23.1% in January 1975. At Chrysler the 33% fall in the hourly-paid labour force between 1973 and 1975 was in the same league as its earlier 40% employment collapse between 1957 and 1958.[40] While national auto unemployment fell back to 4% in 1977 and 1978, the spectre of job insecurity had visited the 1960s generation of American auto workers and left a double legacy: fear and disorganization of opposition. For when the 1967-1973 "young militants" were called back, they were dispersed throughout the plants. The work groups that had established sufficient trust and confidence to

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40. US Department of Labour, BLS, Employment and Earnings, January issues; company data.

create collective sectional loyalties against unfair management actions between 1967 and 1973 were split up - partly by design and partly through the automatic 'bumping' lay-off and recall procedures.[41] The individual militants who returned were more isolated than ever.

After the mass lay-offs of 1958-1961, the tradition of resistance had returned with a layer of stewards, local officers and sections of workers whose trade unionism had been formed in the combative 1940s. In the 1974-75 recession, however, the militant tradition was evicted from the plants along with the younger workers - and when they did return those who tried found it almost impossible to recreate from scratch the earlier widespread opposition. Perhaps the single biggest difference was that they could no longer appeal to the generalizing issue of racial discrimination. Those who tried to mobilize resistance found themselves faced by a substantial layer of black supervisors and an overwhelming majority of black stewards and local officers, who were more reliant on managerial good will than before, and were still more dependent on the international.

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41. The plant-wide and Detroit-wide seniority agreements that entitled laid off workers to 'claim' jobs in departments and plants other than their own if there were lower seniority workers on those jobs and they wished to make the move.

Consultative bargaining

In Chrysler the local agreements of the 1960s were already periodic and ritualized consultations about a limited range of working conditions rather than contests about day-to-day managerial authority. But the occasional combativity of national bargaining ensured that the local bargaining relationship was also institutionalized around the recognition of conflicting interests. So the way arguments about the number of pay phones in Dodge Main took place, for example, reflected both the national balance of forces and degree of open conflict, as well as the tradition, politics, and personalities of the two local teams of negotiators. When, in the late 1970s, the international retreated from the prospect of a national struggle,[42] the adversarial character of Local 3's ritualized consultations became still more muted.

This development is illustrated in the protracted nature of Local 3's 1976 negotiations and in the content of its demands and the final agreement. Local negotiations began in July 1976 and quickly "broke down", leading to a strike vote in August. In reality nothing much was then expected to happen until after the

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42. In the 1979 and 1980 contract years, the UAW announced in advance it would not strike the major companies. In 1983, the successor to Fraser, Owen Bieber, spoke to the press of the dawn of still "more cooperation", saying: "I don't want to suggest that you will never see a strike again by this Union in the United States, but on the whole you are going to see a lot more cooperation than ten years ago." New York Times, June 26 1983.

national contract was signed on November 5 1976. Despite this, regular meetings of Hamtramck Assembly labour relations and personnel staff with the local's ten person negotiating committee continued. They certainly helped cement the closer relationships between the four local officers, five plant committee members, one international representative from the UAW's Region One and individual managers. In 1973 the local agreement had been signed within days of the national contract; but with the new emphasis on getting results at plant level in 1976 the international didn't put the same pressure on the locals. Negotiations began in earnest only in November and continued for two months until the final agreement was reached on January 7 1977. The whole bargaining process over just one agreement had lasted seven months.[43] Even if the issues being negotiated had been dominated by questions of managerial authority and struggled-for restraints, the negotiating process alone would have defused and demobilized any potential resistance.

Many aspects of the work environment were discussed, but neither the demands raised by Local 3 nor the agreement eventually reached challenged managerial authority. Table 24 breaks down the plant-wide and trim department demands raised in Local 3 in 1976 - during the height of the last big boom in Chrysler sales and production:

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43. DMN, January 22 1977.

TABLE 24

AN ANALYSIS OF THE PLANT-WIDE AND TRIM DEPARTMENT DEMANDS RAISED IN THE 1976-77 CHRYSLER-LOCAL 3 NEGOTIATIONS

Demand negotiated	Plant-wide restraints Social	Efficiency	Strug.fr	Demand negotiated	Trim Department restraints Social	Efficiency	Strug.fr
Health and safety: roof leaks, lighting, fans, water fountains etc.....	3	9		Fans for extracting fumes and cooling...		5	
Meals and vending facilities.....	1	8		New smoking rooms....	2		
Availability of lockers...	4			New lunch area, pop and coffee machines.		2	
Parking lot problems.....		3		More lockers.....	2		
Elevator service.....		2		Extra time clock.....		1	
				Elevator service.....		2	
				Extra pay phones.....	2		
				Heating complaints...	2		
				Clean 6th floor of Trim shop daily.....		1	
				Supply new hog ring guns, metal plates for body pushers....		2	
				Extra coveralls.....	1		
Environment	**8**	**22**			**9**	**13**	
Pay discrepancies.....		5					
Medical department: passes, proper treatment.	2	1	1				
Insurance and compensation office hours.....	1						
Notification of POX cases.	1						
Technical procedures	**4**	**6**	**1**				
Shift transfer request book: proper receipts....			1	Notification to UAW of all job changes..	1		
Notice of lay-offs, call-backs etc: in writing....			1	Equalization of over-time hours.....			1
Attendance penalties: issued quickly and record clean after two months...		1	2				
Seniority workers to be offered overtime before probationary workers.....			1				
New wording for emergency call-out of workers from the plant.....			2				
Managerial procedures		**1**	**7**		**1**		**1**
Insistence on spelling out in full "failed to follow a direct order" offence..			1	"Environmental relief" for job where workers jump in and out of every car.....			1
Foremen working.....			1				
Managerial authority			**2**				**1**
TOTAL	12	29	10		10	13	2

SOURCE: Dodge Main News, January 22 1977.

The demands reflect certain shop floor grievances but clearly omit many others. Those that reached the list submitted to management were first distilled through unit and plant committees into a 'bargainable' shape. But what they show of the bargainers' expectations is revealing. Improvements to the work environment made up 88% of trim department demands and 59% of the plant-wide demands. And of these environmental issues, an overwhelming proportion (59% and 73% respectively) could be justified directly by the bargaining committee in terms of increasing the efficiency of the plant. The second largest category of demands concerned changes and improvements in existing procedure: together, 'technical' and more overtly job-linked 'managerial' procedures made up 35% of the plant-wide demands. By 1977, struggled-for restraints on managerial authority were only a very small proportion of the total demands raised,[44] and they were unlikely to be made at the departmental level where workers felt least legitimacy in exercising control over supervision. Instead they would be raised at plant level, and even then overwhelmingly in a procedural context: seven of the nine demands for plant-wide positive restraints on managerial prerogatives were procedural demands. Workers were only confident enough to make demands that management exercise its authority according to its own rules; demands for limits on that authority had become infrequent.

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44. 430 separate demands were lodged and answered from the six divisions within Hamtramck Assembly, and 52 for the whole plant. some of the demands contained multiple clauses; others were repititions. An analysis of all 482 demands suggests less than 25 could be categorized as representing the assertion of positive, struggled-for restraints over management.

The picture of fewer restraints being imposed on managerial authority becomes clearer still in the actual agreement reached early in 1977. President Joe Davis wrote an introduction to the agreement that summarized its "highlights":

> Some of the highlights of the Agreement are as follows:
>
> A Vending Service for our food which would give us completely enclosed air conditioned cafeteria with hot food and a menu approved by the Local Union. Breakfast will be served prior to the start of the shift each day that the plant operates.
>
> Many of the problems experienced by the members regarding pay shortages and checks not available for an employe when the week's work is finished have been settled. We have firm language that will take care of this problem in the future.45

The plant-wide demand that foremen who continued to "work on hourly rated jobs after being counselled by the Union be given time off as a disciplinary penalty, up to and including discharge" was dropped in exchange for copies of the letter about foremen working included in the national contract. And the plant-wide demand for the elimination of "failed to follow a direct order" as a reason for disciplinary action was settled by management agreeing "that the reason for discipline will be specifically stated". The few other struggled-for restraints over management that got through the local officers' filter were given similar treatment. The only 'advances' that could be claimed were on issues where management could see efficiency gains or was under legislative pressure. Chrysler could easily "assure the

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45. DMN, January 22 1977.

Union that roof leaks will be repaired on a continuing basis" and even give a priority list of roof leaks "for completion as weather permits".[46] The bargaining committee ended up with a local contract that closely reflected the careful selection of initial demands. Under this system workers' expectations would not be dashed - since they were never raised in the first place. Bargaining had become a process that bore no effective relationship to rank and file workers' daily frustrations.

Generations change

The shift to greater dependence upon the international was assisted by the retirement, isolation or defeat of those who had carried the earlier tradition of shop floor resistance from the 1950s into the 1960s. The Pasicas, Liskas and Foxes, and even the Domanskis of the 1960s generation of Local 3 officers, had all acquired their union experience leading and participating in the wildcat strikes of the 1940s and 1950s - and their generation used the 30-and-out contract retirement provisions to quit auto work in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In contrast, the last three Dodge Main presidents, Andy Hardy, Joe Davis and John Smith, and virtually their entire executive boards and plant committees, were hired into Dodge Main in the 'quiet' early 1960s. The international also changed. Under Walter Reuther between 1946 and 1970, William Serrin's suggestion that "the UAW

46. ibid.

became a right-of-center union with a left-of-center reputation"[47] was close to the mark. Reuther wielded immense power cloaked in a very limited formal democracy. His strength meant the international might have sat out the demand for more black representation. In 1970 the position was that while 30% of UAW members were black only 13% of staffers were.[48] But when a very surprised Leonard Woodcock assumed the presidency of the UAW after Reuther's aircrash death in 1970, it opened up the possibility of small changes.

Woodcock, an ex-Socialist Party survivor from Reuther's distant radical past, was elevated to the presidency by the closest possible vote on the International Executive Board: 13 votes to 12 against the man Reuther had been grooming as his successor, Chrysler department vice president, Doug Fraser.[49] To stay at the top of the UAW ever since 1947, when he was first elected on the Reuther slate to the IEB (after just six months' work in an auto plant), Woodcock had long since abandoned his early radicalism and had learned a great deal about survival. In less than firm control of the UAW, he decided to court rank and file popularity by taking on GM for the first time since

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47. Serrin, op cit, 148.

48. ibid, 150-151.

49. Victor G Reuther, The Brothers Reuther and the story of the UAW (Boston; Houghton Mifflin, 1976), 188, 471.

Reuther's epic 1945-46 struggle, and to strengthen his own power base by improving the racial balance of local and international officers. Fraser spelt out the calculations the international made about dealing with black militancy:

> You've got to be prepared to take issues away from them, not allow issues to arise upon which they can exploit the situation. Unless you do that they're going to grow and grow.50

Dodge Main's new black leadership was a convenient source of black recruits to Solidarity House and the international staff: in 1970, Charlie Brooks, Local 3's first black vice president; in 1974, Andy Hardy, Local 3's first black president; and in 1978 his successor Joe Davis.

The international itself, once staffed by activists who had risen to prominence through their capacities in organizing rank and file struggle against the corporations - or through their friendships with those who had - underwent the same transformation in the early 1970s that had occurred at local level. A generation of former full-time local officers replaced a generation of former activists and agitators. The end of the Reuther era and the rise to high office of a second generation of union bureaucrats experienced in suppressing rank and file militancy rather than mobilizing it was widely welcomed by management. Dick Clancy, Dodge Main's personnel manager throughout the 1970s, recalled:

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50. Quoted in 1970: ibid, 306.

> Relationships changed remarkably in the 1970s between us and the UAW. It required statesmanship of a high order by a lot of people. There had to be a philosophical thrust on the part of the International Union towards harmony and to provide the opportunity to effect harmony...
>
> I'm thinking of occasions when their people got out of line and went undisciplined and anarchistic, and they would take disciplinary action and say - "Get the hell into the main stream of the labour movement or get the hell out."
>
> The International Union kept a close eye on their own people.51

The "philosophical thrust" to greater co-operation, Clancy suggests, was provided by Fraser during his period as the UAW's Chrysler vice president:

> Fraser ran a pretty professional shop. Of course, he had to be assured we had someone there who would sort things out on our side. But when he was, if I had a problem I'd call Chrysler Corporate Headquarters and they'd contact Fraser or someone else in the international who would help our problem.52

Fraser, in this respect, was doing no more than bringing Chrysler's labour relations into line with the pattern of problem-solving at GM and Ford, where behind-the-scene contacts between the union department and corporate headquarters had been a way of life since the 1950s. But the impact of change is always more marked than the impact of consistency. Fraser became identified with pressure for industry-wide cooperation to complement the closer relationship achieved at Chrysler.

The combination of political co-option of sections of the black movement, of a major recession and of significant changes in personnel and tradition at both the local and international levels of the UAW, had worked, by 1977-1978 to bring labour

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51. Dick Clancy interview, Highland Park, Detroit, 29 July 1982.

52. ibid.

relations in Chrysler plants closer to the industry 'norm' than at any time in the preceding forty years. Resistance independent of the muted channels provided by the contract had been virtually outlawed. Events of the next two years were to push these developments still further and create a situation in which Chrysler became a trend-setter in extracting concessions from its workers.

CHAPTER 17

NON-ADVERSARY PROCEDURE

1979-1982

By 1979 Chrylser's labour relations had been decisively reshaped. Restraints on the arbitrary exercise of managerial authority that had been initiated, exercised and renewed through collective shop floor organization and activity, had been removed. A period followed in which Chrysler management was overhauled, the company underwent a severe contraction, and the UAW persuaded its members to accept significant cuts in their real wages and reductions in benefits.

Section one considers the fordization of Chrysler management and its implications for the labour process. Section two describes the closure of Dodge Main in 1980. Section three traces the emergence of concession-bargaining.

I. Fordization

Chrysler's production and market share slide began in 1977. By 1978 it was already building up losses on the scale of 1975 and the billion dollar losses of 1979 and 1980 were clearly on the

horizon:[1]

	Chrysler's net profit or losses ($m)
1974	- 52
1975	- 282
1976	+ 423
1977	+ 163
1978	- 205
1979	-1,097
1980	-1,710
1981	- 476
1982	+ 170

In August 1978, less than a month after Henry Ford II had fired Ford president, Lee Iacocca, both Riccardo and the Chrysler director who was manager of the Rockefeller family fortune offered him a move to Chrysler. Three months later, the 54-year-old Iacocca got Cafiero's job as president, with the understanding he would take over Riccardo's job as chief operating officer a year later. Cafiero was rather unceremoniously pushed aside.[2]

The appointment of Lee Iacocca was more than another change in top personnel. By introducing as top executive a man with 32 years' experience at Ford, Chrysler was buying (for $1.5 million

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1. Time, March 21 1983. The figures are net income after taxation. For 1974 and 1975 they are taken from Moody's Industrial Manual, 1979, 369. The profits recorded in 1982 were the result of the sale of the Tank plant originally built with federal funds in 1941. See above, Chapter 9.

2. Moritz and Seaman, op cit, 213-219.

down and an annual salary of $360,000) more than one individual: it was buying the Ford system.[3] What occurred in 1978 was the start of a management restructuring exercise to test whether the cost control, financial, organizational and sales and product strategies that had operated in the 1960s and 1970s at Ford could bring new life to Chrysler. The catalyst was provided by events in the real world and Iacocca happened to be available at the moment the bell began to toll on the old management system.[4] Iacocca brought with him several other current or retired Ford executives who collectively introduced fordisation. He even hired the Ford advertising agency to run Chrysler's account. Illustrative of the kind of relationships Riccardo had with his subordinates was the fact they weren't allowed to smoke in staff meetings; and symptomatic of the new regime was that although Riccardo remained chairman for nearly another year, Iacocca could smoke freely. The Ford executives were contemptuous of the old Chrysler managerial tradition. Iacocca was quoted as saying: "This company took 25 years to become decadent - I mean rotten to the core."[5]

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3. Always keen to personalize any issue, journalists Moritz and Seaman conclude their highly informative book with the argument that the Chrysler story and especially the success of Lee Iacocca "demonstrates that, far more than institutions and strategies, it is men and their ideas who succeed or fail". But, of course, this fails to look beyond the "great man" to the institutions and ideologies from which "their ideas" derive. Moritz and Seaman, op cit, 347.

4. Stuart, op cit, 134, points out that Riccardo had tried to get a replacement for Cafiero from GM before he approached Iacocca.

5. Moritz and Seaman, ibid, 224-5; Iacocca explicitly allocated blame in Time, March 21 1983: "I think the Townsends of this world...wrecked this industry."

Structural changes in management began almost at once. By the time Iacocca had spent nearly four and a half years at Chrysler, when Time magazine gave him the accolade of a front cover and the title "Detroit's comeback kid", pre-Iacocca top management had virtually disappeared. Of the 28 highest-ranking Chrysler executives only four pre-dated Iacocca, and the four most senior officers were all ex-Ford.[6] Only one of the restructured nine-member top Operations Committee survived the first two years.[7] This managerial 'revolution' went deeper than had Townsend's nearly twenty years earlier,[8] and impacted on day-to-day operations in four main ways. First, Iacocca altered the channels of managerial responsibility and information and introduced the standard Ford practice of management-by-objectives. The quarterly listing of individual managers and executives' objectives for checking against performance dramatically shook up management and stimulated an on-going review of managerial efficiency in every plant. It is not easy to distinguish the inherent benefits of the new process of accountability for management from the stimulus of the system's 'newness'. But early in 1979 it put Chrysler's production

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6. Time, March 21 1983.

7. Moritz and Seaman, op cit, 224, 282.

8. The details of Iacocca's total restructuring of Chrysler's corporate organization chart are discussed in ibid, 224-7.

processes under a managerial microscope - and led rapidly to the closure of a 32-year-old trim plant in Lyons, Michigan in June and, later that month, to the news that Dodge Main itself would be closed a year later.[9]

The management-by-objectives system quickly targetted building cars for the sales bank rather than for real sales. At the time, the fall of the Shah of Iran and the resulting fear of new oil cutoffs triggered a major shift in the market to subcompacts early in 1979. Chrysler's large cars were again swelling the sales bank and working capital was falling rapidly towards the point of no return. So Iacocca determined to phase out the sales bank as rapidly as possible, and cut current production; he laid off 15,000 workers in January 1979 and then a further 5,000 by early June.[10]

A new quality control system and new financial controls also directly affected day-to-day operations. Quality control was re-established as a separate management function, encouraging front-line supervisors to report recurring manufacturing faults rather than deal with poor quality by the standard tactic of

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9. Time, March 21 1983; these were the first announcements of a long series of closures. By early 1983, the total of plants closed since Iacocca took over was 16 out of the 52 separate North American plants that had existed in 1978.

10. ibid, 251-4.

increasing the pressure on the workers doing the job: point of production conflict was filtered back to the engineering and design departments. This did not work unambiguously to ease shop floor tensions since the organizational change went along with an old-fashioned quality drive - the familiar management response to recession of shifting pressure from volume to quality.

Ford financial controls had another significant effect on the character of the labour process. They enabled Chrysler to identify the cost and profitability, or absence of it, of individual components or processes. This directly encouraged product standardisation. Since the early 1960s Chrysler had been providing a mass of options in its attempt to spread its narrow model range across all segments of the market. At the Warren truck plant, for example, seven shades of white were offered to customers; and these were now cut to two.[11] The impact of standardization on the labour process was considerable: changes in the 'mix' of work are at the centre of most mass production assembly line disputes. If a job sequence was suddenly changed even though no actual increase in work was involved, management appeared to its workers to be acting 'illegitimately'. Change upset the anaesthetic effect of a steady work routine. By cutting

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11. ibid. 238-241.

the variety of options coming down the line, and by ensuring longer runs on the presses and in the machine shop, the new management was able to reduce the potential number of points of shop floor conflict.

II. Dodge Main closes

Mounting losses during 1979 spurred the new ex-Ford top management team to axe facilities with above average unit costs. To no-one's great surprise, Dodge Main, once known as "Chrysler's flagship" came near the top of the list. What perhaps was a surprise was the ease with which this once militant plant was closed. This was a mark of the weakness of workplace unionism in Chrysler by the late 1970s, and an encouragement to Iacocca to pursue the rest of his rationalization programme still more quickly.[12]

The decision to close what was known in the 1970s as Hamtramck Assembly was taken early on in management's review programme. Dodge Main's eight storey structure meant that plant overheads remained exceptionally high in periods when production

12. 14 further plant closures took place over the next two years, including four major ones in the Detroit area: Eight Mile/Outer Drive Stamping, Mack Avenue Stamping, Huber Avenue Foundry and the Warren Recreational Vehicle Assembly plant.

was cut; stock movement around the plant was always more complicated (and hence more costly) than in the single-storey plants built in the 1950s and 1960s; and when one of its four production lines was taken off in January 1979, and the labour force of about 8,500 cut by 25%, it became what the jargon called "overfacilitated" - too much investment and too many overheads producing too little output.[13]

Once closure was decided, Chrysler's labour relations department gave considerable thought to implementing the shut-down without creating unnecessary problems with the UAW or the remaining workers. Initially management determined to play a very long game. On May 30 1979 it announced the plant would close in June 1980. The aim was for the idea of closure gradually to become legitimate - something that was inevitable and a part of management's rights that could not be challenged. Under the plan, the UAW could go through all the motions of heated opposition but by the time the actual closure was imminent the will to resist would be gone. The long notice doubled neatly as a gesture towards long-term consultation with the international and an uncharacteristically astute piece of forward-planning by the

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13. Clancy interview. He believed there were "no efficiencies we could have got in the short term to keep that plant open." This view is challenged by Ed Liska, who argued that Dodge Main was still capable of producing half a million cars in 1973 and could still have been retained as a major assembly plant if the investment put into the Jefferson and Belvidere plants in the late 1970s had been put instead into Dodge Main; Liska interview.

labour relations department. It ensured that the "Save Dodge Main" campaign was virtually doomed from the start. While 3,000 people turned out on the first Saturday demonstrations,[14] there was no immediate urgency to strike the plant or prevent the work being transferred elsewhere. Militant speeches were translated into lobbying congressmen, and the campaign rapidly lost momentum, despite widespread support from the people of Hamtramck.

The original timescale was overtaken by the sharpening of the crisis. Chrysler's 1979 losses were rising to $1 billion, a record for an American company. In August 1979 workers on two more of Dodge Main's lines were laid off and from September 1979 only one line was left producing the Aspen car on the first shift. The seniority system now worked with a vengeance for the 2,300 remaining workers. None of these workers had worked at Dodge Main for less than ten years, and many had started there, like Edie Fox, in the 1940s when they were in their late teens or early twenties. They clung onto full-time employment by 'bumping' younger workers - and so were forced to move from their previous easier jobs in material handling, the stores and sub-assemblies back on direct production. "It was terrible," recalled Edie Fox, "seeing all those workers in their fifties back working on the

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14. Labor Notes, June 22 1979.

line, jumping in and out of cars like they had last done twenty years earlier."[15]

Finally, these workers joined management in wanting the closure to happen quickly - to end the agony of exhaustion on the line and to enable them to collect severance and early retirement benefits. They had had enough. Between 1,500 and 2,000 of these Dodge Main veterans retired rather than move to the jobs on the second shift at the Jefferson Avenue assembly plant they were entitled to.[16] When management announced on December 9 it was bringing the closure forward to January 1980 there was no resistance left. Clancy was still worried, but only about the quality of the remaining cars:

> The only real worry I had was that the last four weeks of production would be bad - but this was the best quality we had built there for years, that last month.17

Even this had been taken care of. Chrysler had given the supervisors a commitment that if they went "out of here pridefully" they would all be guaranteed jobs on the second shift at the Jefferson Avenue assembly plant, building the new K-car scheduled to be launched in August.[18] So the last cars produced at Dodge Main were built with surplus supervisors literally

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15. Fox interview.

16. ibid.

17. Clancy interview.

18. ibid.

all over the place.[19]

Under these circumstances, Clancy acknowledged later, "You'd have to have had leadership to do anything different" than accept closure as inevitable.[20] But an alternative "leadership" in Local 3 capable of mobilizing around a perspective of resistance had not existed for nearly ten years. In 1979, when mass collective resistance to plant closures and wage and benefit reductions was an unlikely, but all the same, the only alternative to passivity before the crisis, neither the organizational nor the ideological basis for such resistance remained inside the plants. The only "legitimate" collective form of expression had become the UAW local and national apparatus. Elsewhere, Chrysler workers exercised their frustration by throwing out half the incumbents in 40 local officer elections in 1978 and 1979.[21] But the anger remained unstructured and impotent and the new administrations operated within the same rules as their immediate predecessors.

At Dodge Main, 'Big John' Smith, who had automatically taken over the Local 3 presidency in January 1978 when Joe Davis took a job with the international, was certainly not going to lead any fight. Even the remotest chance of such an eventuality had been

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19. Fox interview.

20. ibid.

21. Dave McCullough, "Chrysler: Capitalizing on the Crisis", Changes, October 1979, Vol 1, No 9, 12.

ruled out by the UAW campaign to win congressional backing for a federal government bail-out. Smith and the last Local 3 EB spent their last weeks deep in paperwork ensuring that as many of Dodge Main's 8,500 on-roll workers 'bumped' other workers in other plants - a possibility established in the special Detroit-wide transfer agreement negotiated by the international as a supplement to the 1979 contract. Two and a half years after the closure, and a year after the plant was physically demolished, Dodge Main's former personnel manager estimated that up to 5,000 of these workers had received job offers elsewhere.[22]

The seven-month closure process, as Clancy proudly said, "didn't affect production".[23] On January 4 1980 the last car went through the final assembly department and the conveyor stopped. The remaining workers cleaned up and went home. The plant that had produced cars continuously since November 1914 was shut down. One hundred and fifty yards away down Jos. Campau, the UAW Local 3 hall closed a few weeks later. Its death, like its birth, was symbolic of the arrival of a new period in management-labour relations.

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22. Clancy interview.

23. ibid.

III. Concession-bargaining

The closure of Dodge Main was brought forward and the small possibility of real resistance diminished still further once Fraser agreed to treat Chrysler as a "special case" in the 1979 contract negotiations. Fraser's own public stance changed quite dramatically in the late 1970s. In 1977 Woodcock retired and 60-year-old Doug Fraser was finally allowed the reins of power. In one way he was like his predecessor, another stop-gap president chosen more because of his length of service and the proximity of his retirement than because of any exceptional qualities. But, the last of the old 1940s Reuther caucus, Fraser was particularly able at dressing up management-union cooperation in radical rhetoric. So when, like Woodcock, he felt he had to open his presidency with a gesture of defiance, he chose publicly to attack the Carter administration's failure to implement its promised pro-labour measures and slam GM for failing to support the "fragile, unwritten compact" between labour and management. GM, he charged, had not countered the backwoodsmen-employer propaganda that "labour power" was a growing menace. The UAW was being forced, Fraser argued, to return to the struggle perspective of the 1930s:

> I believe leaders of the business community, with few exceptions, have chosen to wage a one-sided class war today in this country - a war against working people, the unemployed, the poor, the minorities, the very young and the very old, and even many in the middle class of our society. The leaders of industry, commerce and finance in the United States have broken and discarded the fragile, unwritten compact previously existing during a past period of growth and progress...
>
> I cannot sit there seeking unity with the leaders of American industry, while they try to destroy us and ruin the lives of the people I represent.
>
> I would rather sit with the rural poor, the desperate children of urban blight, the victims of racism, and the working people seeking a better life...

> We in the UAW intend to reforge the links with those who believe in struggle: the kind of people who sat down in the factories in the 1930s and who marched in Selma in the 1960s.
>
> I cannot assure you that we will be successful in making new alliances and forming new coalitions to help our nation find its way. But I can assure you that we will try.24

A year later Fraser was indeed part of a "new coalition": he was a member of a corporate delegation going to Washington to plead for federal funds to bail out Chrysler and, at the next Chrysler AGM, he was elected a member of Chrysler's Board of Directors.

Fraser's 1978 resignation from the Carter administration's Labour Management Group was largely rhetorical, designed to warn off the auto industry from pursuing an open shop (non union) policy in the move away from its traditional sites in the mid-West that was then taking place.[25] Behind his talk of "class war" was a clear desire for a return to class peace, and his very real anger against GM was largely because it still seemed ignorant of the coming crisis. Two significant developments persuaded Fraser to abandon his 1978 rhetoric of a "one-sided class war" in favour of his 1979, 1980 and 1981 advocacy of concessions at Chrysler and 1982 advocacy of concessions at Ford and GM. One was the fall of the national economy into deep recession at the very moment

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24. Solidarity, July 1978, 3-4.

25. R Cohen, "The employment consequences of structural change in the auto industry", Massachusetts Institute of Technology Research Paper, (Boston: MIT, June 1981). The extra costs involved in continuing this industrial relocation during the 1979-82 recession, and the adoption of the Japanese kan ban system of reducing costs by maintaining very low inventories - and ensuring steady supplies by locating the components plants close to the assembly plants - effectively brought a halt to the relocation process in 1981 and 1982; S. Jefferys, "Recession, Innovation and Industrial Relations: the US car industry in crisis", Employee Relations, V, no. 3 (1983), 7.

the Japanese challenge was threatening the survival of the US auto industry as Fraser knew it. The second was Chrysler's response to the threat of bankruptcy in which it undertook an unprecedented managerial and labour shake-out that removed any middle ground. Fordization of Chrysler, in the context of a real economic crisis and the whole history of the post-war UAW, meant Fraser had no alternative in answer to the question "Which side are you on?" than to reply unequivocally - "With the new management." And once he had openly entered a closer relationship with Iaccocca, it was only a matter of time before Ford and GM drew into line. Fraser's experiences within Chrysler prepared him to lead the whole UAW into acceptance of quality circles, employee involvement, plant closures and, in 1982, into concessions at Ford and GM.

In 1979, Fraser's earlier encouragement of environment efficiency and social bargaining led him to see 'recession' bargaining as a natural development. Clancy, who moved to Chrysler's corporate labour relations headquarters after the closure of Dodge Main, recalled how the basis for the cooperation of the early 1980s was laid in the previous decade:

> In the 1970s when we had to get deviations from the Union and required them to bend in the interests of productivity, I found that if the issue was sufficiently vital they'd (the Union officers) use a great deal of commonsense and go along with you.26

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26. Clancy interview. He remarked a big change in UAW officers' attitudes from the 1960s to the 1970s.

It was no great step from this to a willingness to assist the company in Washington by settling for less than Ford and GM. But however small this last step, it was taken in a new direction, one from which it was soon clear there would be no return. The 1979 contract negotiations turned out to be the first of three waves of concessions between September 1979 and January 1981 that sliced $1 billion from Chrysler's labour costs compared with those of GM and Ford.

The impact of concession-bargaining at Chrysler was felt far beyond the auto industry. Once the employers' argument that domestic labour costs were a major part of the crisis was accepted by the UAW for Chrysler, then when Ford and GM also moved into loss situations, the logical step was to extend the same argument to them. Late in 1981 the UAW agreed to early negotiations with Ford and GM on the 1982 contracts, and 'take away' contracts were signed at both companies in the spring of 1982. Within three years of the first Chrysler concessions, its concession-bargaining pattern had become the 'norm' in both public and private sectors of American industry. The UAW's agreement to lower the price of the subordination of Chrysler workers to their management became a signal to employers everywhere to demand similar sacrifices.

Concessions: round one

The US auto industry was hit in 1979 by a new shift to fuel efficient cars after the overthrow of the Shah of Iran, import substitution, and the onset of world recession. The domestic car market then fell for four consecutive years from its 1978 peak, and America's third-biggest producer was squeezed close to bankruptcy. Chrysler's top management had been changed in 1970, in 1975 and again in 1978. All to no avail. In August 1979, the company that had inveighed most severely against "federal intrusion" begged the federal government for a $1 billion tax concession. But the Carter administration was unwilling in a pre-election year to be seen to be handing over such sums on a plate. Riccardo's request for the tax relief to be offset against projected profits for 1981 and 1982 was rejected and government agencies began to estimate the impact of the largest-ever corporate bankruptcy in US history.[27] At this point, congressional hearings began on the possibility of another option - a federal loan guarantee. This was far from Riccardo's liking, since it involved providing Congress with an unprecedented amount of confidential company information on profits and product plans, and the establishment of a emergency loan-guarantee board with responsibility for administering the loan. So in September

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27. A Chrysler bankruptcy would involve a decline of about 0.5% in the GNP, a rise in national unemployment of between 0.5 and 1.09%, an additional bill of $1.5 billion in welfare payments and an annual tax loss of $500 million; Moritz and Seaman, op cit, 279.

Riccardo announced he was stepping down immediately in favour of Iacocca.[28]

UAW president Fraser accepted the seriousness of Chrysler's situation and used what influence the union had in Washington to push for the bail-out. As a demonstration of good faith the existing 1976 contract was allowed to expire in early September 1979 without the "working without a contract" disputes of previous years. Negotiations continued smoothly until agreement was reached six weeks later on October 25. In this contract the UAW broke the Big Three bargaining tradition established since 1955 and gave Chrysler concessions that added up to $203 million less than the costs incurred had they followed Ford and GM. Fraser told the press:

> These actions make it clear that the UAW has met its responsibilities in the broad effort to save Chrysler workers' jobs and restore the company to stability. The burden now rests on the Congress to act promptly to assist Chrysler as well as on the banks, supplier companies and others with a stake in this matter.29

Intent on demonstrating a common front to Congress, Chrysler also

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28. McCullough, op cit, 8-15, has argued that Chrysler was not nearly so close to bankruptcy as it pretended, that it was going for government aid because it was cheaper than the alternatives and would encourage UAW concessions and that if the plea for a government bail-out had failed, the banks would have made more credit available in order to protect their earlier investment. But while verification of such a "conspiracy" theory of management behaviour would require access to what are totally closed company records, it is unlikely such a tactical approach can be squared with the open hostility to "federal intrusion" in big business so often manifested by Chrysler and the Detroit managerial ethos in the past. It is also more probable that Riccardo's hurried announcement of his early retirement was the result of bitterness at the prospect of a federal-imposed solution.

29. Quoted in Stuart, op cit, 140.

picked up on the inclusion - almost as a joke [30] - in the union's 1976 demands of one seat for a union director in the boardroom and agreed Fraser should serve on the Chrysler board from the next AGM in May 1980. It was also agreed that in future, international reps could sit in on the last stage of plant-level discussion of grievances. Aware of its own need to introduce new technology and to make massive labour savings with the minimum union resistance, management saw the advantages of greater involvement by international officers even more remote from the shop floor than the local officers, in resolving plant problems. The concessions meant a six month delay in increasing the basic wage for a major assembly worker from $7.75 an hour to $9.07; the delay of a year in the introduction of eight workers' paid personal holidays that was taking place at Ford and GM in 1980; and improvements in Chrysler workers' pensions in January 1980 would only be 70% of the increases to be paid at Ford and GM. [31]

In October 1979, Fraser and director of the UAW's Chrysler department, vice president Mark Stepp, stressed to their own members that while concessions were the only alternative to total closure, they were only temporary:

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30. Interview with Robert Jensen, assistant to Mark Stepp, UAW Chrysler vice president, June 1981. Jensen stated that this demand was only included by the UAW in 1976 as an after-thought when they noticed that Chrysler UK had accepted a union-nominated director as the price for its bailout by the British government in 1975.

31. UAW, Chrysler Newsgram, November 1979.

> There is no way your bargaining committee would allow any deviation from the pattern if we were not convinced that Chrysler was 'on the brink' and that concessions are necessary to save the jobs of Chrysler workers...
>
> Despite the concessions, in the third year Chrysler workers will reach the pattern achieved at GM and Ford.32

The international assured its members that "full parity" would be restored by May 1982. Their arguments carried the day. Confident that the vote to recommend ratification would be carried overwhelmingly at the 256-member Chrysler Bargaining Council in Kansas City on October 31, Fraser and Stepp took a special chartered flight to Washington to hear the news they had been campaigning for: Carter had agreed to ask Congress to approve a $1.5 billion loan guarantee programme conditional on Chrysler itself finding another $1.5 million to match the federal loan.

Concessions: round two

Two developments blew Fraser's promises of a return to the pattern off course: first, Congress imposed take-backs as a condition for agreeing the federal loan guarantee; and second, the deepening world recession hit Chrysler with a further $1 billion loss in 1980, and prompted Ford and GM to join the queue of managements seeking this particular method of union cooperation to cut labour costs. On December 19 1979, when the Senate finally agreed a $1.5 billion federal loan guarantee, it

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32. UAW, Chrysler Newsgram, November 1979, 2.

added the qualification that the UAW would have to forfeit "unrecoverable" concessions worth a further $259 million.[33] The following two weeks saw a new period of intensive activity by the UAW's negotiating committee culminating on the day after Dodge Main was closed in an agreement on modifications to the 1979 contract. Two days later, on January 7 1980, President Carter signed the Chrysler Corporation Loan Guarantee Act.

Fraser, Stepp and Joe Zappa, the chairman of the negotiating committee, presented the second round of concessions with the same argument used three months earlier:

> The additional contract concessions occurred for one simple reason: the alternative was an immediate Chrysler bankruptcy and a massive loss of jobs for Chrysler workers...
>
> Despite the necessity of making those additional sacrifices to save our jobs, the UAW Negotiating Committee succeeded in getting Chrysler to agree to modified contracts that achieve three crucial goals:
>
> 1) The new contract fully protects the complete cost-of-living allowance;
> 2) The pact provides the full health and fringe benefit package and all of the pension improvements negotiated in October; and,
> 3) Chrysler workers still will receive GM and Ford pattern wages, benefits and pensions by the end of this agreement.[34]

A qualification was buried in just one short sentence: "We cannot assure that Chrysler will return to health in the future with absolute certainty." But what came over was the repeated threat of bankruptcy and the renewed pledge that the concessions would be recovered "by the end of this agreement" in September 1982. Without an alternative, the depleted workforce gave a second

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33. Stuart, op cit, 141-147.

34. Letter To all UAW Members at Chrysler-US, January 8 1980.

overwhelming ratification to these changes.

The new concessions froze wages for a year from March 17[35] and ruled out any paid personal holidays (PPH) during the whole term of the agreement. This contract modification was the first actual "take-back" concession, although even here it was a retreat on promised holidays rather than existing conditions. A novel element in the package encouraged workers to identify still more closely with Chrysler by allocating shares worth $162.5 million, or about one sixth of the then virtually worthless Chrysler stock, to a special trust under an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP). And another new clause was designed to appease the Canadian section of the Chrysler workforce: Canadian Chrysler workers would be allowed to ratify the agreement separately and to negotiate their own contract in 1982.[36]

Concessions: round three

During 1980 cooperation between the UAW and Chrysler continued. In June joint, management-worker quality committees were established in Chrysler plants along the lines of GM's

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35. This was the date they received the rise that had already been delayed six months and brought an hourly major assemblers' rate up to $9.07.

36. Wages in Canada were already significantly below their American counterparts as a result of their being paid the same nominal hourly-rate while the Canadian dollar was actually worth only about 90% of the American.

Quality Circles and Ford's Employee Involvement programme. In August 1980 Fraser joined Iacocca and Detroit mayor Coleman Young at the new K-car model launch ceremony at the Jefferson Avenue plant. By then Chrysler had a new management, a fuel-efficient 1981 model, a streamlined labour force, and a major cost advantage over its American rivals. But as the world recession deepened and the Carter administration attempted to control inflation by raising interest rates, K-car sales slumped. The result was a $1.7 billion loss in 1980. Iacocca publicly demanded an extra $600 million "take-backs" and asked the banks to convert $600 million of long-term debt into preferred stock with the rest being paid off at 30 cents on the dollar. To make sure the message was understood, the Treasurer in Carter's outgoing administration, William Miller, warned that without the concessions there would be no more funds available from the Loan Guarantee Board.[37]

The UAW let out a howl of rage. Fraser immediately released a letter to Iacocca objecting to his tactic of negotiating in public:

> Given Chrysler's difficulties, our hope is you will devote full time to handling the company's problems and will stop attempting to be the self-appointed spokesperson for the auto industry and corporate America on labour-management relations.38

But in a statement issued by the UAW's Chrysler Council two days

37. Moritz and Seaman, op cit, 329-333.

38. Douglas Fraser, Letter to Lee A Iacocca, December 20 1980; circulated to all UAW locals.

later the UAW agreed to re-open negotiations on the 1979 contract - saying it had no choice but to respond to the government's actions:

> Thus, while it may be necessary for extraordinary steps to be taken regarding the Chrysler-UAW collective bargaining agreements, these are a response to the requirements of the government decision makers rather than the demands of management...
>
> UAW members will do what is necessary to meet the requirements of the Loan Guarantee Act, but we must know what is true necessity rather than merely a management goal, and we must be assured that others will do their fair share.39

The UAW position, of course, was pure semantics. Miller and the Loan Guarantee Board merely reflected management policy when they indicated the scale of new concessions required and the areas in which they could be achieved. The protest was clearly for the record and was designed to help sell the third round of concessions rather than mobilize resistance against them.

The new agreement of January 14 1981 gave the company a further $622 million cost advantage over the national contract pattern, everything Iacocca had originally demanded. It implemented a virtual wage freeze for the last 20 months of the contract, allowing only one more topping up of the cost-of-living allowance and stopping the two further scheduled increases in the base rate; it delayed the next scheduled pension increase for five months and stopped the others; and it withdrew the proposal to give three shift workers a rise in paid lunch time from 15 minutes to 20 minutes a day.[40] Two letters attached to the new

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39. Statement by UAW International Chrysler Council, December 22 1980.

40. UAW-Chrysler, Additional provisions pertaining to US and Canadian employees, January 14 1981.

contract provided 'sweeteners': Chrysler agreed to negotiate a profit-sharing agreement at least as favourable as the 1961 American Motors Corporation contract, "no less than 15% (of the) profits in excess of 10% of net worth" [41] would be distributed to the workers. And it agreed to "formalize a non-adversary procedure in which committees will be formed at the national and local level" so UAW officers could be "given the opportunity to constructively input ideas into the decision-making process prior to implementation of decisions which might adversely affect their job security". Chrysler retained its managerial authority: "the Corporation cannot agree to any limitation on the responsibility for the final decision", and "the work of the committee is and must remain confidential"; [42] but the UAW had extended its right to consultation on plant closures.

The third wave of concessions dwarfed those which preceded it. Against the background of nearly 18 months of concession-bargaining, and of an apparently unstoppable stream of closures, the total wage freeze proposed by extreme right-wing senators during the 1979 loan guarantee hearings was overwhelmingly ratified. Previous concessions had been baited with promises of "parity" by 1982 but, by the third round, Chrysler workers'

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41. ibid, 6.

42. ibid, 14.

expectations were already so low this was no longer necessary.

Significant resistance to shop floor managerial authority had long since ceased. By 1981 it was clear the international would no longer place other than consultative restraints on company-wide managerial authority. The restricted legitimacy that had been superimposed on the weak workplace organization of the mid-1970s, had been reinforced and transformed by Chrysler's crisis to the point where the collective articulation of distinct workers' aims had stopped. Fraser was aware of the change taking place and defended it. He told critics of his taking the directorship on Chrysler's board, "Maybe the adversary relationship is precisely what's wrong with the American labour movement."[43] The UAW was now in a junior partnership relationship with Chrysler management. It shared the same goal as Iacocca - the economic survival of the company - and was committed to cooperation to attain it. Crucially, it no longer had a distinct raison d'etre as an organizer of collective resistance to management. "The union in Chrysler," an international officer said confidentially in the summer of 1982, "no longer exists in

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43. Quoted in Moritz and Seaman, op cit, 340.

the plants in any recognizable form."

The lowering of the price of UAW members' labour reflected a shift in the balance of class forces in the US in favour of managerial power. The shift occurred as managements exploited opportunities created by the recession and the longer-term decline in effectivity of American workers' unions. The 'sweeteners' provided to the UAW in exchange for the concessions - Fraser's seat on the Chrysler Board, ESOP, profit-sharing, joint consultation on closures and joint labour-management quality circles - were presented to UAW members as a step forward by labour. Understanding them in the context of the overall shift in balance of power puts a different interpretation on them. Had they been struggled-for restraints on managerial authority, they might have had a different role. But far from representing any greater restraining ability by labour as a distinct interest in the workplace, these essentially consultative procedures obscure labour's independent interests. At best, they merely weaken workers' collective representation; at worst, they could help destroy it and provide unrestrained managerial authority with still greater workplace legitimacy. In 1954 Clark Kerr wrote:

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44. Interview by author in Solidarity House, Summer 1982.

> Conflict is essential to survival. The union which is in constant and complete agreement with management has ceased to be a union.45

If the 1980s develop into a decade in which union organization becomes synonymous with a "non-adversary" relationship with management, then the quiet closure of Dodge Main in the first week of 1980 may have heralded more than rationalization of a large core company in face of a severe economic crisis. That closure might well signify the start of the end of unionism as it has been experienced over the last fifty years.

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45. Kerr, op cit, 231.

PART FIVE

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 18

POWER AND EXCEPTIONALISM

Part One established that shop floor conflict in Chrysler plants was much more visible than in GM or Ford. In explaining this difference in the narrative at least five themes emerged. First, shop floor relations appeared as outcomes of practices with specific histories. Often the outcomes were unintended and the actors were unaware of likely results. Second, the context of these specific situation was determined by an unremitting struggle between capital and labour at the point of production. Third, this struggle took a different shape in different auto companies and the experience at Chrysler was significantly different from that at GM and Ford. This difference is explained in terms of the greater strength of shop floor organization in Chrysler, a strength that developed primarily as an unintended consequences of management actions. Fourth, an underlying theme spelt out more clearly below, is that this Chrysler experience paralleled in many ways the experience of industrial relations in the UK car industry. While Chrysler was an exception in the US, its experience questions the view that the US working class was so totally different from working classes elsewhere. Finally, the study has stressed the complex interaction of factors shaping management's frontier of control over the labour process: its role

in shaping the form, politics and traditions of workplace employee organization; the countervailing impact of the presence or absence of independent working class politics in wider society; and the often-overlooked strength of managerial power.

Chapter 18 reviews the findings and then considers their implications for the argument about the 'exceptionalism' of the American working class.

I. Review

Organization

Early mass unionism and the subsequent establishment of collective bargaining in Chrysler was decisively influenced by management behaviour. Walter Chrysler's blend of paternalism and vehement opposition to union organization led him to establish a works council 'company union' with more influence than at GM. His system of works council representatives merged into an independent union whose shop stewards already received de facto recognition. The stewards were recognized as shop floor, sectional bargainers from the first UAW-Chrysler contract of 1937. The company's continued resistance to unionism led it to oppose the imposition by the NWLB of an outside arbitrator in the grievance procedure during World War 11, helping to foster the workplace legitimacy of sectional industrial action. The existence of a sectional-bargaining tradition established a broad-based layer of union-involved workers (not necessarily all

'activists') who identified more closely with their fellow workers than with the international officer; it legitimated sectional industrial action; and it extended this legitimacy to the labour process issues that were most likely to become grievances: production standards and discipline.

Only as a result of the 1950 strike did a changing management became fully reconciled to the permanent presence of unionism as represented by a markedly less combative international UAW. But it took the removal of the old divided areas-of-influence management structure in 1956, and the threat to its resources presented by the late 1950s recession, before the company finally mobilized its full resources for a confrontation with local union organization. The outcome decisively re-shaped Chrysler's shop floor unionism along the lines then operating in GM and Ford: sectional stewards were deprived of all bargaining opportunities; and the balance of influence between the local and the international tilted decisively in favour of the latter. Confrontation was placed in an institutional framework where it could readily be accessed by management and union leaders, but not by rank-and-file workers. Finally, a further management restructuring brought on by massive losses and the onset of world recession in the late 1970s resulted in a major demonstration of managerial power. In two years Chrysler closed 16 of its operational sites and the UAW finally disowned institutionalized confrontation in favour of its top officers conducting concession-bargaining and its local

officers endorsing quality circles at plant level. Resistance largely returned to where it had been in pre-union days: underground.[1]

Politics

Workers' non-work politics were also highly significant in shaping collective organization. Between 1932 and 1936, the election of a reform President, Franklin D Roosevelt, and the passage of the NRA and Wagner Act, gave workers a new sense of "rights" inside the workplace. In Detroit the political presence of Father Coughlin justified workers in joining his 'independent' union in thousands at a time when union members elsewhere in the auto industry could be counted only in the low hundreds. The right versus left factional fight in the UAW from 1937 to 1939 reinforced the early independence of local union workplace organization from the international, and the defeat of the Martin faction boosted the fortunes of those most strongly identified with local autonomy at the very moment that America began gearing up for World War II.

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1. David Montgomery, "The Past and Future of Workers' Control", Workers' Struggles, Past and Present: a 'Radical America' reader, ed. James Green (Philadephia: Temple University Press, 1983), 400.

An upsurge of wartime nationalism coexisted with workers using the tight labour market to strengthen their restraints on managerial authority. But in the slacker labour market of the second half of the 1940s, management focused that nationalism into a powerful anti-Communism. Connecting with post-war immigration from Eastern Europe, anti-Communism became a principal means by which 'socialist' politics - which could include the views of liberal Democrats, of sympathizers with the British Labour Government's nationalization measures, as well as of the few thousand Communists and few hundred Trotskyists - was evicted from the labour movement. An 'independent' ideological justification of shop floor resistance was effectively dismissed from workers' vocabulary. Shop floor solidarity and resistance remained, but the absence of a wider oppositional political framework made it much easier for management to reimpose its control over the labour process in the late 1940s and 1950s.

The rise of the black civil rights movement from the late 1950s, however, introduced another ideological basis for opposition: black nationalism. And, accompanying the Black Power movement in the late 1960s, a growing hostility to the Vietnam War weakened the hold of anti-Communist nationalism among a minority of young white workers. On the shop floor, these 'outside' political developments triggered a labour revolt that for a brief period in the early 1970s looked to many as if it might permanently reshape the contours of workplace control. Top management then exercised its power over lower levels of

management by appointing black supervisors and even black labour relations personnel. This was in response to an upsurge of resistance which, reflecting the reaction of a largely new labour force to rising inflation in a tight labour market, was initially legitimated by the emergence of independent black politics.

These minority movements faced not merely the immensely powerful corporations; they also faced entrenched organizational opposition from the existing labour unions, and they failed to create on-going organizational structures that had the necessary legitimacy to survive the major slump of 1974-1975. Chrysler also worked with the international to secure the transition to conservative local union administrations that were more representative of the increasingly black labour force. The physical defeat of the most militant black nationalists, the co-option into two-party political life of many black reformers, and the ability of the American political system to sustain the body-blow of Watergate, all gradually eroded the wider political justification of resistance and prepared the way for the resurgence of America's political right in the late 1970s. In turn, the political defensiveness of American liberalism in the early 1980s made it still more unlikely that a new movement opposing concessions and closures could survive.

Managerial power was defined in Chapter 1 as the superior relationship capital has over labour; for while both need each other, ultimately capital has greater mobility. But, of course, neither capital nor labour ever comes fresh-faced to the market. So managerial power is not simply a pure embodiment of the ownership of a certain sum of capital, it reflects resource size and how easy it is to access. Managerial power resources are shaped by their histories into new or old plant, modern or outdated equipment, liquid or fixed assets, production in expanding or declining markets, rising or falling market shares, expectations of profits or losses and so on. And the historical pattern of ownership and management structure play a key role in facilitating or inhibiting access to these resources.

The scale of managerial power resources available to the 'Big Three' auto makers tilted the probability of their maintaining control over the labour process strongly in their favour. But the companies accessed these resources differently because of variations in their ownership and managerial structures. Thus in the 1930s GM operated a hostile anti-union policy while simultaneously considering how to contain the threat to its shop floor control in the event of outright resistance becoming too costly. Neither Ford nor Chrysler had a comparable policy-making facility at the time. However, in major periods of threat to its profitability and existence, Chrysler could still move quickly to copy labour control techniques. Its power

resources were sufficient for it to move against and then break shop floor restraints on its rights to manage in the 1950s, and again, helped by the state, to break the mould of institutionalized confrontation with the UAW in the 1979-82 recession.

Authority

What implications do these findings have for managerial control over the labour process? Front-line supervision's shop floor authority was extensive, and challenged only by short-lived resistance by individuals and small work groups in the late 1920s and early 1930s. In an unpredictable market, aribitrary measures were the rule. In the mid-1930s, as sales rose, management moved a little way to answering workers' demands for greater pay and work stability before collective action won union recognition in 1937. This gain represented a major encroachment on managerial authority on the shop floor. Disciplinary decisions by front-line supervisors became 'actionable' and remained so until the late 1950s. In the late 1960s, supervisory authority came under a fresh threat from the new labour force which disappeared with the labour shake-out of the mid-1970s.

Since the mid-1970s management has had the authority to implement unilaterally virtually any change in work procedure and pace of work it required. The individual worker's only possible recourse would be to raise the issue subsequently in a grievance procedure - which would rarely alter the result of a time-studied

production standard or work assignment. The threat of an ordered escalation of sanctions in the event of worker resistance replaced the arbitrary actions of the foreman of fifty years' earlier. But although sanctions could be queried after the event on the basis of procedural case-book law, this is more a paperwork problem for the foreman than an effective restraint on his authority. The sanctions might mean a worker could infringe the rules more frequently than in the past before finally being fired and not reinstated. But the vastly greater number of foremen, the wider range of intermediate sentences and the frequency with which they are administered suggests sanctions are as much the mechanism that secures compliance as ever.

Labour process

It is necessary, as David Montgomery suggests, to do more than expand the understanding of the specific ways in which change occurred. There is an obligation to "distill from all this variety of experiences a basic explanation and periodization for the evolution" of events.[2] The picture of effective collective shop floor organization restraining for nearly twenty years the fairly constant sanctions-backed pressure by foremen is important. The evidence supports those critics of Braverman who have questioned his lack of attention to the impact of workers' organization on managerial control.[3] It suggests that

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2. David Montgomery, "To Study the People", Labor History, 21, no. 4 (Fall 1980), 492.

3. Wood, op cit, 12-18.

technological change in the late 1940s (the deskilling of trim workers), the mid-1950s (deskilling of much machine work), and the 1960s (decreasing amount of lead, solder and metal finishing needed, deskilling of most skilled paint shop workers) was not as important as the level of workers' collective organization in determining the movement of control. But the evidence also endorses Braverman's underlying theme of the centrality of the drive system and Taylorist work organization. It points to the continuity of the drive system of labour control from the 1930s to the 1980s in mass production despite the erection of institutionalized collective bargaining systems at the international and local levels.

How significant are conclusions drawn from a study of one firm for our understanding of the relationship of management and managed in America as a whole? Are these conclusions about the factors shaping the moving contours of managerial control exceptional to Chrysler or can they be generalized? And if so, what are the implications for the debate about American exceptionalism? These issues are now considered in the second section of this concluding chapter.

II. Exceptionalism revisited

Until recently the debate about 'American exceptionalism' focused primarily on how the working class was different.[4] Pelling's list of "the peculiar characteristics of the American labour movement" was typical of many that used description as a substitute for analysis:

> ...class solidarity is weak and ethnic or social differences have tended to heighten feeling between the skilled and unskilled...
>
> The final permanent characteristic of American labour... is its lack of class consciousness... in part a product of ethnic and racial rivalries, and of the divisive effect of different social conditions in different parts of the country. It owes a great deal to the factor of high wages... And we may be sure that the ease with which workers could become foremen had a great effect in earlier years.5

The familiar catalogue of observations about ethnic and racial divisions, geographical dispersal (the impact of the frontier), economic prosperity and social mobility are drawn together to explain "weak" class consciousness and a "lack" of class solidarity. This approach is wrong on two counts. First, it fails to make explicit the ideal form of consciousness and solidarity

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4. Davis argues that while Western European labour was 'incorporated' through reformism, US labour was similarly 'incorporated', but through the "negativities of its internal stratification, its privatization in consumption, and its disorganization viz-a-viz political and trade union bureaucracies", op cit, 7-8; Seymour Martin Lipset reviews the debate from its beginnings, "Why no Socialism in the United States?", Sources of Contemporary Radicalism, ed. Seweryn Bialer (Boulder: Westview, 1977). But P K Edwards [1983a], "The Exceptionalism of the American Labour Movement: the Neglected Role of Workplace Struggle", Industrial Relations Research Unit Research Paper (Coventry: University of Warwick, February 1983), 16-30 (mimeographed); and P K Edwards [1983b], "The political economy of industrial conflict: Britain and the United States", Industrial Relations Research Unit Research Paper, (Coventry: University of Warwick, 1983), 19 (mimeographed) revitalizes the debate on exceptionalism by shifting its terms of reference. He argues that management's greater power resources over labour's dovetailed with a historic opposition to unionism to create the major divergences in industrial relations patterns between Britain and the United States.

5. Henry Pelling, American Labor (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1960), 166, 221.

with which American workers are being compared. Shop floor unionism in Dodge Main, for example, contrasts with Pelling's assessment by suggesting an enduring sense of class identity and of occasional demonstrations of common purpose with other workers which was not significantly different from that found in a parallel study conducted by the author of the similarly-sized Austin Longbridge plant in Britain.[6] To have validity, assertions of "peculiarity" must be rooted in firm comparisons. Second, even a cursory examination of the evidence of "strong" American class consciousness and solidarity presented in Jeremy Brecher's Strike! suggests that several of the elements most frequently listed as causing "weak" class consciousness, such as the geographical dispersal and ethnicity of labour, have in certain circumstances produced its opposite.[7] If these factors work to defuse consciousness at some times and to consolidate it at others, they are not very helpful explanatory variables.

What is needed is a keener comparative edge to the elucidation of differences and similarities both in patterns of working class behaviour between different American firms (and

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6. Comparative historical study currently being written up for publication by the author on development of shop floor industrial relations at the Austin/BMC/British Leyland Longbridge plant, 1939-1982, and the Pressed Steel/Rootes/Chrysler Linwood plant, 1942-1981.

7. Brecher's history begins: "This book is the story of repeated, massive and often violent revolts by ordinary people in America"; op cit, 10.

industries) and between the American and other specified working classes. The discussion of Chrysler's exceptionalism by comparison with GM and Ford is clearly a helpful starting point. Here is an industry in which technology can be treated as constant; where each firm's labour market, although not identical, was situated largely in the same area of the United States; where plant size - if GM's Flint Chevrolet division is seen as an extended River Rouge or Dodge Main - was roughly comparable; and in which managements dealt with just one international union. Yet there were major differences between these firms in the level of open conflict, especially in unauthorized strikes. This poses questions not only about Chrysler, but also about GM and Ford. For as Scott and Homans put it in their essay on the high incidence of wartime wildcat strikes: "The usual explanations why men left their work failed to explain why they stayed."[8]

The Chrysler evidence explains why some men stayed and others wildcatted in terms of the establishment of sectional-, plant- and company-specific traditions of workplace legitimacy. Traditions that condoned sectional industrial action were developed and sustained by the insertion of politics and collective organization in the spaces left by conscious

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8. Scott and Homans, op cit, 280.

managerial commission or by short-sighted managerial omission. Where local traditions of active restraint on managerial authority did not long survive the powerful boost given them by the achievement of struggled-for union recognition, it was because there were not these same lapses in managerial discretion.

This is not a simple omniscient managerial determinism: the independent activity of collectivities of workers was crucial in taking advantage, or not, of the opportunities management made available.[10] But these opportunites arose as a result of management actions. The exceptional wildcat strike frequency, retention of a higher steward density and existence of more effective restraints over managerial authority in Chrysler than in GM and Ford for most of these fifty years was at root a reflection of differences in their top managements. GM had adopted a multi-divisional structure by the mid-1920s, and could apply its management-by-policy tradition to industrial relations by the mid-1930s. In its dealings with the UAW thereafter it had the capacity to consider the consequences of particular methods of opposing union encroachment on its managerial rights before

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9. William Brown, op cit, 98-9.

10. Hyman [1975] argues: "The objective characteristics of capital, and the policies adopted by managers, create pressures and constraints which set limits to the possibilities of trade union action. But their determining effect depends also on the extent to which prevailing patterns of relationships are treated as inevitable by trade unionists themselves"; op cit, 118.

trying them out. As Harris has argued, GM (and other large firms which emulated its labour relations strategy) was not attempting to incorporate union organization; rather its management structure was sufficiently flexible to test out a range of different methods of combating the threat of unionism.[11] Ford adopted the GM management structure in the late 1940s, although as a family-controlled company it retained a powerful idiosyncratic flavour; while Chrysler effectively only adopted the Ford management structure as late as 1979 and aspects of its 1920s' autocratic, intuitive, one-man-rule management structure still survive today. Chrysler managers traditionally agreed with the chief executive or got out. They were allowed little room for experimentation and virtually none for systematic reflection. Often, even if they had wished to do so, the weakness of their centrally-operated accounting system made it very difficult to establish much more than superficial 'scientific management' practices. Faced with opportunities provided by contradictory management policies of extreme hostility followed by pressure for production at any costs, Chrysler workers seized them.

This conclusion underlines the importance of providing reasonably similar subjects if the purpose of a comparison is to develop a theory of differences. Comparing Chrysler with IBM,

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11. Harris, op cit, 198.

Sears & Roebuck or IT&T, companies whose 1978 net sales were all within a few million dollars of Chrysler, would not have thrown as much light on essential differences as has this comparison with GM and Ford whose net sales were four times and three times respectively greater than Chrysler's.[12] This is why the Anglo-American comparison is particularly instructive for an international theory of differences. For while there are many obvious differences including those of scale between the two industrial relations systems,[13] there are also important similarities, which the Chrysler experience of a high shop steward density, sectional bargaining and considerable unofficial conflict, reinforces. Edwards questions the assumption that America differs significantly from Britain in lacking a labour movement that demands fundamental political change. And he goes on to suggest that the many shared social and legal traditions, the common history of 'voluntarism' in industrial relations and the emphasis on collective bargaining as the key means of industrial problem-solving, make Britain the most useful

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12. Fortune, August 12 1979: 1978 net sales of these companies were: GM, $63.2bn; Ford, $42.8bn; IBM, $21.1bn; Sears & Roebuck, $18.0bn; Chrysler, $16.3bn; IT&T, 15.3bn.

13. The most obvious are the absence of multi-union bargaining units in the US, the determination of pay and conditions there primarily through centralized company- or industry-wide long-term contract bargaining, and the comparative lack of involvement of shop floor union representatives in bargaining; J David Edelstein and Malcolm Warner, Comparative Union Democracy: Organization and Opposition in British and American Unions (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction, 1979), 18-20; an earlier list of differences drawn up by Jack Steiber stressed (1) the involvement of the international union in US plant agreements, (2) the vertical organization of US unions, (3) the greater coverage of detail and the provision of arbitration in US contracts, (4) the fixed duration of US contracts, and (5) a list of other lesser differences including the existence of the Taft-Hartley Act; op cit, 235-7.

comparison to make in explaining those aspects of the American experience which are different.[14]

UK experience

Testing the hypothesis that American management, its power resources and its flexibility of access to those resources, was the major structural factor shaping differences in levels of conflict, what can we learn from the last fifty years of industrial relations in Britain's car industry?

Union density in British car plants fluctuated at between 10 and 20% of the workforce, primarily among skilled workers, in the 1930s.[15] With the conversion to war production and the protection of the Essential Works Order and a former union general secretary as Minister of Labour, union membership rose to around 80%. But although there were notable exceptions, renewed managerial

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14. Edwards [1983a], op cit, 3; Davis, by contrast, expressly states his assumption that the key difference between America and other advanced industrial societies is "the absence of the level of working class self-organization and consciousness represented in every other capitalist country by the prevalence of labourist, social-democratic, or Communist parties...", op cit, 4. But these political parties do not all represent a similar degree of "class self-organization and consciousness", as a comparison of working class British Labour Party activists with, for example, French Communists shows. In many respects the former would have more in common with American working class Democrats. This 1971 assessment of the Democratic Party was a little crude, but close to the mark: "The Democratic Party is dominated by labour in every respect but one - the actual politicians are not of the labour movement, and they get its backing on the cheap"; Paul Booth, "Theses on Contemporary US Labor Unionism", Radical America, 5, no. 1 (Jan-Feb 1971), 2.

15. H A Turner, G Clack and G Roberts, Labour Relations in the Motor Industry (London: Allen and Unwin, 1967), 193.

hostility in the slack post-war labour market restored the general picture of union density in the car industry to about 40%.[16] Only in the late 1950s and early 1960s did membership in most car plants rise quite quickly to 90% or higher.[17] Unlike the situation in America, shop steward numbers continued to rise with the expansion of union membership from the mid-1950s.[18] Sectional stewards not only served as dues-collectors, but in piecework areas management bargained directly with them over pay, and in day-rate areas and plants management had to contend with them over manning levels, job timings and the mobility of labour.[19] In the tighter labour market of the 1960s, and as the loss of formerly guaranteed overseas Empire and Commonwealth sales and the lowering of tariff barriers against European imports stimulated fierce domestic competition,[20] most managements reluctantly accepted significant restraints over their unilateral exercise of control of the labour process in return for short-term cooperation in achieving production targets.

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16. Steven Tolliday, "Government, Employers and Shopfloor Organization in the British Motor Industry, 1939-69", Research Paper (Cambridge: King's College Research Centre, September 1982), 3-5, 18-23; Research by author in progress at Longbridge and at Linwood.

17. In the early 1970s, a study of management and labour conflict in British industry found "100 per cent unionism continued to be one of the liveliest issues in workplace industrial relations"; Turner, Roberts and Roberts, op cit, 23.

18. Turner, Clack and Roberts, op cit, 279; Beynon, op cit, 147; Friedman and Meredeen, op cit, 62.

19. Turner, Clack and Roberts, op cit, 207.

20. Peter J S Dunnett The Decline of the British Motor Industry (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 34, 96-98.

In the UK a major restructuring of the industry took place in the mid- to late 1960s. The only remaining independent producer of car bodies, Pressed Steel, supplying bodies for about 40% of all British-made cars, was divided up between its main customers, Rootes and British Motor Corporation;[21] Chrysler US finally bought Rootes outright;[22] and, in a messy, government-encouraged merger, Leyland-Triumph merged with the biggest car assembler, BMC - that itself had resulted from an unhappy 1952 fusion of Austin and Morris.[23] This major reshaping of the industry was followed in British Leyland and Chrysler UK by attempts to raise labour productivity and reduce labour costs by moving from piecework to measured day work,[24] and in Ford by moving from its historic day work system to a more intensive MDW system.[25] By the mid-1970s, it was clear that the attempt to restore managerial authority in BL and Chrysler UK had largely

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21. Monopolies Commission, The British Motor Corporation Ltd and the Pressed Steel Company Ltd. A Report on the merger (London: HMSO, 1966); Economist, July 31 1965, January 29 1966.

22. D G Rhys, The Motor Industry: an Economic Survey (London: Butterworths, 1973), 27.

23. Graham Turner, The Leyland Papers (London: Pan, 1973), 109-40, 87.

24. Central Policy Review Staff, The Future of the British Car Industry (London: HMSO, 1975), 102.

25. Beynon, op cit, 160.

failed.[26] BL was nationalized and Chrysler UK had to be bailed out by the British government in 1976 before being sold to the French company Peugeot in 1978. What had effectively sealed the fate of the two firms was their inability to compete in product range, age, quality and value with imports into the UK from Europe and Japan.[27] In the 1979-1983 recession managements in Leyland, Peugeot-Talbot, Ford and Vauxhall (GM) implemented a wave of plant closures and job reductions,[28] and in Leyland top management orchestrated a deliberate confrontation with its shop steward organization to remove accumulated restraints over its shop floor authority.[29] Within the last two or three years management in most British car plants has thus re-established the control over the labour process that it effectively ceded from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s.[30]

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26. Central Policy Review Staff, op cit, 102. Measured day work was brought in on the new Marina car at BL's Cowley complex early in 1971, and by September 1974 some 94% of BL's hourly-rated employees were on day work. But "BL accepts that in order to secure acceptance of the measured day work system, they had to agree to manning levels which were often excessive"; H L Ryder, British Leyland: the next decade (London: HMSO, 1975), 34-35.

27. Central Policy Review Staff, op cit, 65-70.

28. Overall numbers employed in UK motor vehicle manufacture (including commercial vehicles and components) fell from 457,200 in September 1979 to 290,6000 in March 1983; Department of Employment, Employment Gazette (London: HMSO, various issues); British Leyland's employment fell from 192,000 in 1978 to 105,000 in 1982; and Talbot (formerly Chrysler UK), from 25,240 in December 1978 to 13,257 in December 1981; Coventry Economic Monitor, 1982.

29. New Statesman, December 7 1979, January 2, 9, October 30, November 6 1981; Robert Taylor, "Where Edwardes drove BL", Management Today, June 1982.

30. Tom Forester, "The New Model Halewood", New Society, February 14 1980; Patrick Wintour, "Ford and the Mysteries of the Orient", New Statesman, November 28 1980; Steve Jefferys, "The Washing-up War", New Society, April 21 1983; D Arnott, "How Vauxhall shifted gear", Management Today, July 1983.

This account places the development of strong shop floor union organization much later than is suggested by Brody and Lichtenstein.[31] But it is important not to dismiss the very real restraints on managerial control over the labour process that existed in most British car plants between roughly 1968 and 1977. In Chrysler UK's Linwood plant, for example, hourly-paid press shop workers in these years completely controlled their own pace of work, organized extended relief periods of an average of 15 minutes in the hour, held shop meetings that customarily extended into working time and were attended by all stamping plant workers, and controlled the allocation of overtime such that management was frequently obliged to offer overtime to large numbers of workers it did not require to get particular jobs completed. No workers were successfully disciplined by management for exercising any or all of these restraints upon the labour process.[32] These restraints were a far cry from the largely unsubstantiated Tolliday and Zeitlin hypothesis that "just cause" grievance procedures in American plants in the 1940s had "a profoundly subversive effect on shop floor discipline".[33] Their

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31. Brody, op cit, 206; Lichtenstein [1980], op cit, 348. It accepts the view of "painfully slow" growth argued by Lyddon, op cit 136.

32. Several interviews with Linwood workers, various dates, 1980-1982; Linwood trade union archive, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.

33. Steven Tolliday and Jonathan Zeitlin, "Shop floor bargaining, contract unionism, and job control: an Anglo-American comparison", ed. Nelson Lichtenstein and Steve Meyer. The American Automobile Industry: a Social History (Chicago: University of Illinois, forthcoming).

erroneous assumption that contract terminology meant "unions had also managed to retain or acquire influence over important aspects of the production process" is clearly shown in their assertion that "in auto, the UAW had won substantial rest periods for assembly workers at the major companies".[34] As has been shown above, not only were contract rest "gains" in the 1960s minimal; but in Chrysler US they never amounted to the total rest periods workers had achieved through their own organization in the 1940s. The Tolliday and Zeitlin thesis that "for most of the post-war period unions were stronger and cut more deeply into managerial prerogatives in American than in British auto plants" is clearly contradicted by this study of American auto union strength at its strongest - in Chrysler's American plants.

How does this brief outline of industrial relations history in an industry with similar technology and products to the American car industry help explain the differences between the two? At this point it is necessary to return to the concept of managerial power and power resources. The major difference between the two industries in the period after 1933 is that the American was significantly larger, more concentrated and more vertically integrated than the British, which had an independent body-building sector until the late 1960s. Another difference was that in Britain too many firms producing too many models limited

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34. ibid.

their ability to gain full benefits from economies of scale. This weakness meant that when the industry rationalized down to four firms by 1968, three of them were multinationals based in the US. This multinationalism in turn meant that two (Vauxhall-GM and Chrysler UK) sustained a share of the domestic market that was too small for long-term profitability, while the third (Ford) moved rapidly to integrate its British plants into its European manufacturing strategy.

One result of these differences can be seen in the gross profits accumulated in the 1960s and 1970s. Between 1960 and 1978, GM earned $37.6 billion profit, Ford earned $13.8 billion and Chrysler US $524 million.[35] In contrast, from 1960 to 1977, British Leyland earned £324.2 million, Rootes/Chrysler UK accumulated losses of £113.5 million, Vauxhall/GM earned £88.6 million and only Ford UK returned American-level profits of £791.4 million.[36] British-based management accumulated significantly smaller power resources and had less room in which to manoeuvre against union organization than was the case in the US.

In British industry as a whole, a similar line of argument is

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35. Stuart, op cit, 106.

36. Dunnett, op cit, 39.

possible. Thus an important conclusion from a tentative comparison of US and UK strike trends is not that strikes occurred more frequently in Britain than in America, but that it is probable they were settled more quickly because of the smaller power resources in general available to British management:[37]

Trends in Strike Indices, United States and United Kingdom, 1931-1979

Period	Frequency		% Strikes lasting under one week	
	US	UK	US	UK
1931-36	60.1		37.8	
1931-39		37.8		68.8
1937-41	106		38.0	
1940-45		81.5		88.4
1942-45	99.6		70.5	
1946-49	90.1	87.5	38.6	-
1950-59	84.6	98.5	44.8	91.7
1960-69	67.5	106	45.3	85.5
1970-79	75.7	115	38.6a	67.4

Note: a. 1970-78
Frequency = Number of strikes per million employees

Not only were the power resources of American capitalists huge, and supported by significant pieces of federal legislation in 1947 and 1959, but its multi-divisional, management-by-policy structure and highly influential financial backers gave it greater ease of access to these resources. In Britain, by contrast, pre-war management structure, style and pattern of ownership remained

37. Edwards [1983a], op cit, Tables 1 and 3. The figures can only be tentatively compared since both US and UK statistics understate the number of very short and small strikes, and it cannot be assumed that they do so either equally or consistently.

virtually intact until the late 1960s.[38] It was only during World War II, as a result of government action, that personnel officers were appointed in most large UK factories,[39] while 34% of American plants employing over 250 workers already had functioning personnel departments by 1929.[40] After World War 11 it continued to be dominated by the old pre-war top management personnel, with their neo-paternalism and individual idiosyncracies,[41] causing deep aggravation when the merger process that had been completed nearly thirty years earlier in America resumed in the 1950s and 1960s. The autocratic-impulsive managerial tradition was welded so tightly to extensive plant-level managerial discretion in the years from 1930 to 1970 that as late as the mid-1970s plant managers within British Leyland would occasionally veto the flow of information to the corporate headquarters.

British car industry management's relationship with government was also significantly more ambivalent than was the case in the United States where all three auto makers were also major producers in the defence industry. Certainly, the post-war UK government regulation of the economy through export quotas on

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38. Littler, op cit, 115, 163; Turner, G, op cit, 204-5; J G Norman, "The Crippling of Chrysler", Management Today, February 1981; Rex Winsburg, "The Labours of British Leyland", Management Today, October 1969.

39. Child [1969], op cit, 111.

40. Bernstein [1960], 166-7.

41. Turner, Clack and Roberts, op cit, 10.

cars, through car hire-purchase rates and regional policy all added to the UK industry's costs.[42]

British workers seized the opportunities made available to them by managements anxious to secure short-term peace to establish widespread restraints on managerial authority. But unlike Chrysler US management in the late 1950s, which used its resources to execute dramatic changes in top personnel, management structure and style and to reshape its labour control strategy, British-owned car firms lacked the foresight and consistency to be able to conduct similar restructuring except when their distinct power resources were in jeopardy, or they were totally reliant on state finance and intervention. The re-establishment of managerial control over the labour process in British car plants during the last five years has thus owed as much to the pressure of state intervention and the disciplinary impact of recession as it has to any deeply-rooted conversion to new managerial method.

This interpretation of the British experience clearly supports the thesis that the behaviour of employers, despite the continuity of worker resistance to managerial control, goes a long way to explaining the distinctive features of that resistance.[43]

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42. Dunnett, op cit, 31-41, 61-5, 87-95.

43. Edwards, P K [1983a], op cit, 35.

In this light both the more open conflict in Chrysler than in the two other major American auto makers, and the greater institutionalization of conflict in post-war America than in Britain, appear less exceptional. Differences there certainly were and are. But they are not the result of some peculiar weakness exhibited by American workers. The case of Dodge Main suggests American workers, like those elsewhere, have struggled and continue to struggle to impose restraints over their managements. But they have done so within a balance of forces determined by their own history and strength and, crucially, by the history and strength of management.

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